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Calgary metro

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Post PM selfie
Harper pulls a Trudeau

metroNEWS

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Flames' David Wideman suspended after hit on NHL linesman
metroSPORTS

Official Don Henderson was knocked — dangerously — to the ice by David Wideman, inset, during the second period in Calgary on Wednesday. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

OUT 'INDEFINITELY'

Animal torturer gets re-arrested

NICOLINO CAMARDI

Calgary man was prohibited from living with, caring for pets

Lucie Edwardson
Metro | Calgary

A Calgary man who was convicted of torturing a cat and dog was re-arrested Wednesday and is facing further animal-related charges.

Nicolino Camardi pleaded guilty to two charges of animal cruelty after a dog and a cat were found dead with their muzzles taped shut in an alleyway in the 200 block of 99 Avenue SE in January 2014.

Medical examinations of the animals found the husky died from starvation and had been "chronically malnourished" while the cat died as a result of asphyxia from a number of injuries to its head, tail and hind limbs.

Camardi was convicted in March of 2015, and was then "prohibited from possessing, having custody or control of, or residing in the same residence as any animal or bird for life."

Calgary police confirmed to Metro that Camardi, who had served 22 months for animal cruelty, had been re-arrested Wednesday and remains in custody.

Brad Nichols, manager of animal cruelty investigations for the Calgary Humane Society, said it's good to see police are being vigilant, but the incident is still concerning.

"For offenders like this there is always monitoring by CPS and our agency as well, so with all the checks and balances I'm glad to see it's working," he said. "It was such a heinous, cruel act so this is one of the individuals we're most concerned about re-offending."

#PRIDETAPE **Should your hockey team rainbow-wrap their sticks?** metroVIEWS

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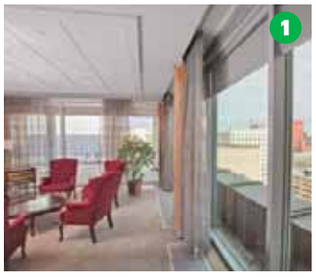
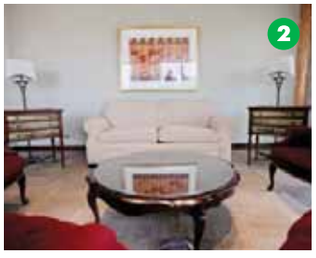
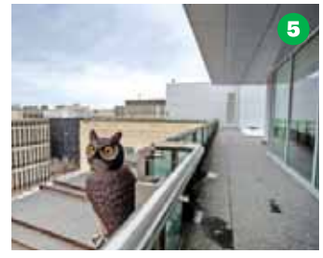
Barbie's got three new bodies — curvy, tall and petite. **Business**







Inside Redford's sky palace

POLITICS

Opulent suite left shabby in wake of severe Tory scandal

A penthouse suite that was dubbed the sky palace — as it came to symbolize what was seen as the former Alberta government's sense of entitlement — is open for business.

But the space has become a frankensuite with bedrooms turned into boardrooms, hand-me-down furniture, bug-eyed plastic guard owls and ex-premier Alison Redford's old couch.

Construction on the penthouse atop the Federal Building in Edmonton recently finished, and the suite has been available for meetings since Jan. 1.

"I think it's been used six times," said Cheryl Oates, spokeswoman for Premier Rachel Notley.

The 11th-floor suite is a design mishmash: half home, half office, equal parts opulent and shabby. A washer and dryer still wrapped in plastic sit just off the main conference room.

It reflects a political trajectory from lavish home-to-be to toxic symbol of government excess to its latest incarnation as a politically radioactive fallout zone.

Redford's Tory successors never stepped foot in the sky palace. Oates said Notley and the NDP caucus don't plan to either.

"It has continued as a physical representation of how the PCs squandered our revenue when times were good," said Oates. "Our government doesn't want to continue that story."

Documents about the suite were released in March 2014 — just days after Redford quit the top job ahead of a caucus revolt over excessive travel spending on herself, her family and friends.

Spending on the suite was cut off by her Tory successors as public outrage grew over the taxpayer-funded project that had already racked up at least $240,000 in 3D design drawings, colour boards, room dividers, blueprints and construction.

The penthouse was originally intended to be a meeting room, part of a $400-million makeover of the historic Tyndall stone building. But sometime in 2012, officials in Redford's office took over and began to remodel the top floor. It was to be done in the style of the luxury Hay Adams hotel in Washington, D.C., with its European linens, marble bathrooms and brass fixtures.

> **I think it's been used six times.**
> Cheryl Oates

The "premier's den" was to be for Redford and her daughter. There were bedrooms, bathrooms, a dining room, lounge, fireplace, powder room, butler's pantry, walk-in closet and room-by-room temperature controls.

The structure itself is elegant: wood flooring, carved wooden posts and floor-to-ceiling exterior windows. Doors open onto a patio with panoramic views of the city. Plastic owls with slowly rotating heads sit on ledges and rooftops to scare away pigeons.

But almost all the walls are bare. There's the odd potted plant. A phone sits on the floor.

Two floor lamps are the only purchases for the suite. Everything else, say officials, was begged and borrowed from government storage or surplus.

Oates said one of the reasons the NDP caucus doesn't use the penthouse is that there are better options, including state-of-the-art meeting rooms just one floor down. THE CANADIAN PRESS

1 The view from inside.

2 Redford's couch is all that's left of her original plan.

3 The sky palace has largely been repurposed as meeting rooms.

4 The main entry hall.

5 A mechanized owl keeps watch for pigeons from the deck outside.

AMBER BRACKEN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

IN BRIEF

Calgary toddler attacked by dog hospitalized

An 18-month-old child has non-life threatening injuries after being bitten by a dog at a home southeast of Calgary.

Rocky View County fire crews responded to a dog attack on a child near the town of Langdon on Thursday morning.

EMS brought the child to Alberta Children's Hospital with bites to the face and upper torso.

Rocky View officials say the child is not related to the dog's owner and that the dog is now in quarantine. The dog's owners say they will have the animal euthanized when the quarantine period is over.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Woman injured in alleged hit-and-run by pickup

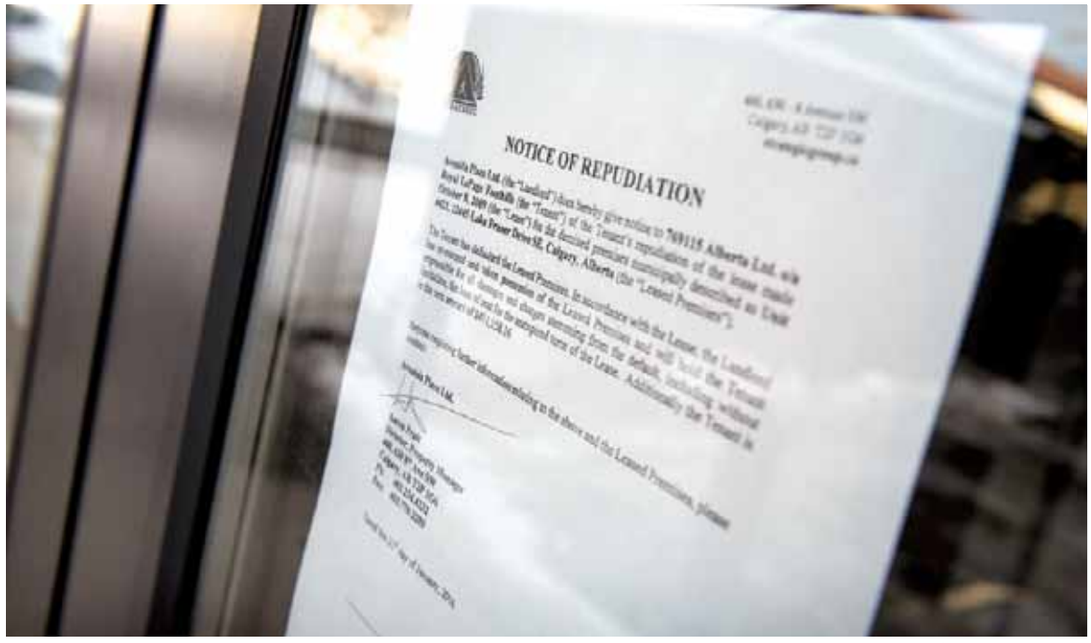
A woman was rushed to hospital after she was allegedly struck by a flatbed semi truck, according to police.

The call came in around noon Thursday after witnesses in the area around Blackfoot Trail and 46 Avenue SE saw a red flatbed semi hit a woman and continue driving.

"At this location, paramedics found a female, believed to be in her 30s, who had been struck by a semi-truck," read a statement from Adam Loria, EMS Public Education Officer. "She was transported to the Foothills Medical Centre in serious, but stable and non life-threatening condition with various soft-tissue and internal injuries."

Police are currently looking for the vehicle and investigating the alleged hit-and-run.

HELEN PIKE/ FOR METRO



This notice posted on one of the former offices of Royal LePage Foothills says the company owes rent arrears for $411,158.16.

JENNIFER FRIESEN / FOR METRO

Shuttered company withheld pay: Realtors

REAL ESTATE

Royal LePage Foothills also owes over $400K in rent

Brodie Thomas
Metro | Calgary

Realtors who worked for a now defunct Calgary brokerage are alleging they haven't received commissions owed to them, according to The Alberta Real Estate Association (AREA).

Royal LePage Foothills, which had 163 realtors, announced it was folding in December.

Amanda Nielsen, public affairs and stakeholder relations with AREA, said their members are alleging varying amounts have been withheld on deals that were underway when the company folded.

She said AREA is listening to concerns and giving advice to those realtors.

"Where appropriate, we're also suggesting they look at legal counsel to represent them to the brokerage and make sure they're being paid appropriately," she said.

She said it's too early to assume bad faith, but they're making recommendations to realtors in the meantime.

Real estate brokerages under the Royal LePage banner are franchises, which are independently owned and operated. Foothills was owned by Ted Zaharko, who did not return calls from Metro.

The business' office on Lake Fraser Drive SE has been vacated, and a notice posted by the landlord on the door said Royal LePage Foothills had defaulted on the lease, and was in arrears for $411,158.16.

In a written statement, Royal LePage's Canadian office said most of the realtors from Foothills have transitioned to two other Royal LePage franchises in Calgary.

FRANCHISE

- Royal LePage Foothills had six offices in Calgary and surrounding areas
- There were 163 realtors working for the franchise when it folded in December

LGBT ISSUES

Schools may nix policies

Ryan Tumilty
Metro | Edmonton

A loophole in Alberta's School Act means private schools may not be bound by laws requiring schools to create new policies for LGBT students.

Changes in the Act, made last year, which require schools to require support for Gay Straight Alliances apply to all schools. But a provision requiring schools to create safe and inclusive spaces leaves private schools out.

Regardless, Education Minister David Eggen is hopeful private schools will fall in line by the March 31 deadline he's set for public schools, according to his staff.

"Private schools still need to be providing safe and caring settings that recognize the requirements and grounds for discrimination in the Alberta Human Rights Act and other applicable legislation, like the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms," said Jeremy Nolais, Eggen's press secretary. Nolais said the government expects private schools to bring forward rules for protecting LGBT students.

He said the government is waiting to see what all schools submit by the March 31 deadline before deciding on a next step.

"At this point we are working with every school authority to try to implement these guidelines," he said.

Nolais added Eggen believes private and public schools will all want to protect children.

"The minister has expressed his optimism that every authority will put forward a policy that will accommodate students and make schools safer."

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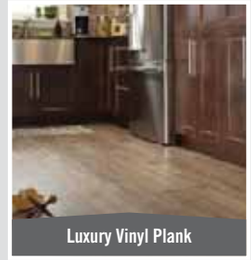
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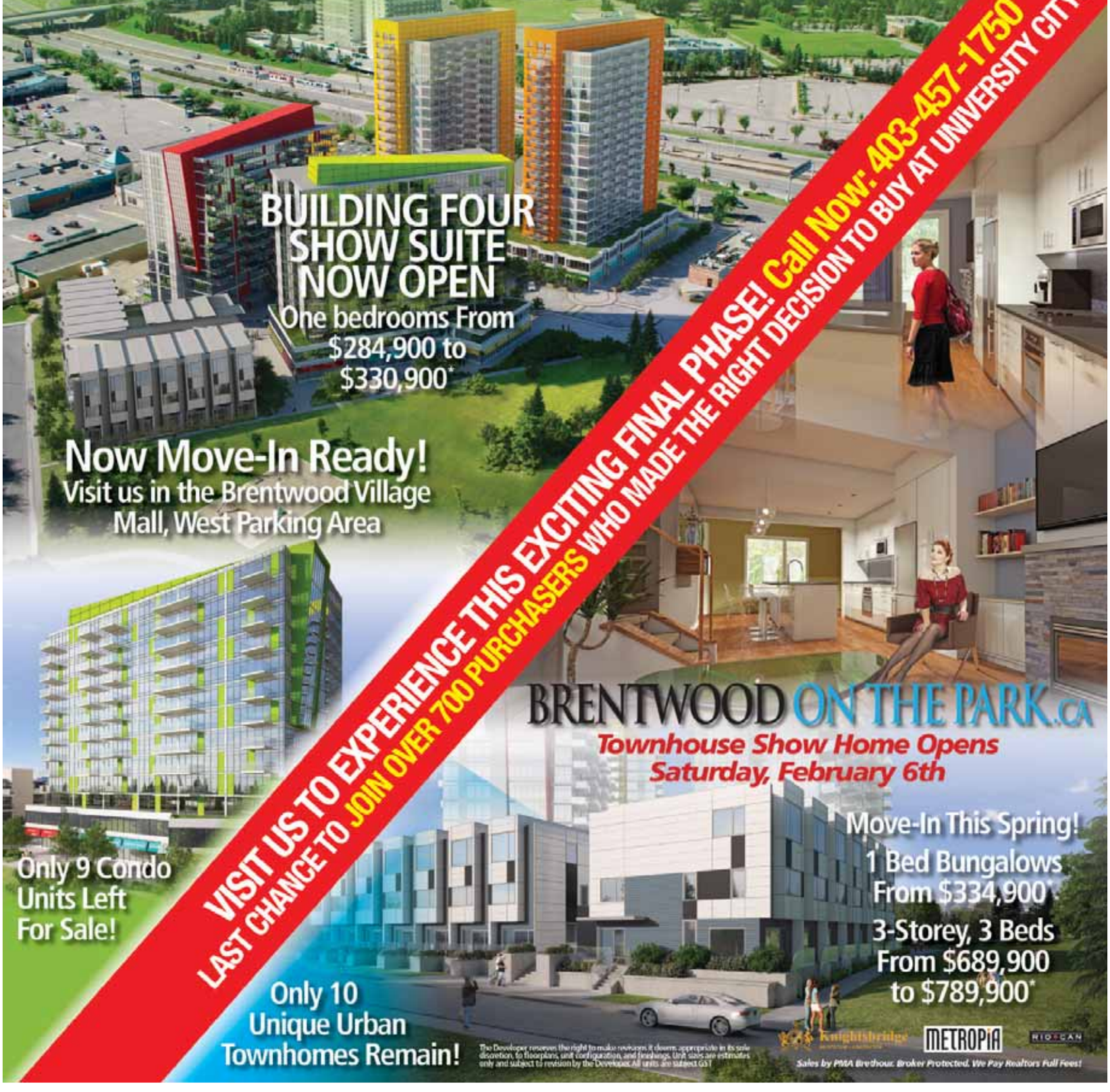

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ECONOMY

AHS 'cuts' to impact varied departments

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

Not one health department will be spared when cuts are implemented at the provincial body overseeing health care.

"You can name me a department, and I bet you it will be affected in some way or the other," said Alberta Health Services' Interim President and CEO Dr. Verna Yiu.

"We're not doing the same cut to every (department). (The cuts) depend on where you are in terms of your current level of efficiency."

The newly-appointed AHS board met for the second time Thursday, discussing how the province's lagging economy has taken a toll on health spending.

Earlier this month, Alberta Health said it was looking at "health efficiencies" to meet budget targets to "bend the cost curve for health."

The province's average increase in health-care costs has hovered around six per cent over the last two years, Yiu said.

For the 2015-16 fiscal year, she said she'd like that average increase to be at 2.8 per cent.

"We're in very tough times," Yiu said. "We didn't anticipate the price of oil to be so low … we have to make choices in Alberta, and we've never had to do that — we don't have the money in our hands to do the things we want to do."

AHS's next budget is expected when the board meets again in February.

Yiu said labour costs make up 70 per cent of AHS's budget. To curb spending, she said AHS is looking at the standardization of hours.

Alberta Health said front-line care won't be affected.

The new CTrains will be equipped with an infotainment system, a screen with news and route information. They will also get upgraded CCTV cameras. METRO FILE

CTrain to get major facelift

TRANSIT

Older models to be upgraded at $600K US per car

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

Some of Calgary Transit's older red CTrain cars are getting a makeover — with some high-tech bells and whistles.

Transit has identified 32 FD160 models they will be wrapping up in blue and sending away to California for upgrades estimated to cost $600,000 US per car ($845,107). The first one should be on its way this week.

Fleet manager Russell Davies said these updates have been on the books for a while. The cars they are sending away are at their half-life mark and will be given some new features to make them compatible with the Series 8 trains.

"We do a bit of technical refresh on those vehicles now, and the intent is to make them a little bit more compatible with our newer vehicles," Davies said.

"They will have some of the features of the newest ones we took delivery of."

The trains will be equipped with the infotainment system, a flashy screen with news and route information. They will also get upgrades to the CCTV cameras giving a full coverage view inside and out of the train. Other upgrades will be made to the driver's compartment and other technical details including updated couplers.

The first train will be looked at for four to five months and after it's sent home, Calgary Transit will be shipping two cars every month until they've finished the process.

"It will delay the actual retirement of our oldest cars," said Davies. "As the new cars come in, instead of retiring the oldest ones straight away we'll have to keep them.… It delays it by two or three months."

Davies added the timing for these upgrades was right because they were able to get a good deal on the infotainment screens and other items with a mass order as part of their newest S200 release.

"It will have a refresh on the inside, but it won't be as dramatic as the new trains, with the flashing lights on the doors, and all that kind of stuff," he said.

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Nancy Southern pays tribute to her father, Spruce Meadows co-founder Ron Southern, at a celebration of his life at Spruce Meadows in Calgary on Thursday. JEFF MCINTOSH/THE CANADIAN PRESS

Family pays tribute to Ron Southern

MEMORIAL

Service was attended by more than 2,000 people

Mourners gathered at a riding arena described as his "cathedral" to say goodbye Thursday to a prominent Alberta businessman who founded one of the world's top equestrian venues.

Ron Southern, who died last week at age 85, established Spruce Meadows in Calgary with his wife Margaret in 1975.

Spruce Meadows has become a fixture for the best riders and horses. The equestrian world's governing body has named the facility the world's top show-jumping venue multiple times.

Southern's daughter, Linda Southern-Heathcott, remembered her father as a man who saw the good in others and taught his family to always do their best.

"Dad, my promise to you is that Nancy and I — along with your team — will keep the traditions alive. We will keep the highest of standards, have the courage to make the right choices no matter how difficult and we will soldier on."

Southern's coffin, sitting at the front of the riding hall, was covered in red roses. Some of his awards, including the Order of Canada, could be seen in one of the building's walkways.

More than 2,000 people attended the two-hour service. Dignitaries who came to pay their respects included former prime minister Stephen Harper, interim Conservative leader Rona Ambrose, Alberta Premier Rachel Notley, Veterans Affairs Minister Kent Hehr and former Bank of Canada governor David Dodge.

Ron Southern METRO FILE

The choice of the riding hall seemed appropriate, Spruce Meadows vice-president Ian Allison had said before the service.

"It's Mr. Southern's cathedral. It's where he spent countless hours welcoming people from around the world, teaching them about his world of the horse."

Southern and his father also started the Atco Group in 1947. It was first known as the Alberta Trailer Company and grew from a 15-trailer operation to an international conglomerate with interests ranging from construction trailers to pipelines to natural gas distribution.

Daughter Nancy Southern said her father loved his family and everyone he had dealings with over the years.

"If you listen carefully, you will hear him saying to each of us: always do your best, always strive for excellence and thank you everyone for helping us to make our dreams come true."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Rideshare regs loom

TRANSPORTATION

City prepares to draft rules for Uber and similar services

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

As Edmonton gets a Canada-wide standing ovation for their rideshare regulation, Calgary prepares to step up to what is sure to be a heated debate on their own version of a bylaw.

And although to the naked eye the iterations of Edmonton and Calgary's hybrid open and closed entry models may seem similar — if not identical — Uber has already raised key concerns.

Last week's TLAC meeting revealed the proposed bylaw includes licensing fees, independent police record checks and mechanical inspections that could total around $500 according to Uber.

In Edmonton, Uber's self-imposed mechanical checks and background checks meet the bylaw's requirement. And licensing is done through the service provider instead of the driver.

"Uber applauds the City of Edmonton for their leadership in being the first Canadian jurisdiction to adopt progressive regulations that embrace ridesharing," read a statement issued by Uber Wednesday. "These rules put in place a workable approach to regulatory oversight — something we have not see come forward in Calgary to date."

Coun. Evan Woolley said he's not sure he'll support a bylaw that puts up monetary barriers prohibitive to operators driving.

"The point that needs to be understood is these industries are not the same industries; the taxicab can and will continue to play an important role," said Woolley. "They're different roles — the average Uber driver uses it to supplement income, and they only actually do it on average for about four to six months, so it's a totally different field."

He said there needs to be background checks and key components like licensing and provincial insurance.

Administration is keeping tight-lipped and won't draw parallels between their proposed rules and the now accepted ones in Edmonton.

But chief livery inspector Mario Henriques did say the city's looking for a "made-in-Calgary solution."

"Our bylaw reflects our operating reality," said Henriques. "Our role isn't to support or promote any one industry; our role is to ensure that we have a safe taxi system."

Calgary will be debating a bylaw Feb. 22 that could help legalize rideshare companies. GETTY IMAGES

> Our role isn't to support or promote any one industry; our role is to ensure that we have a safe taxi system.
>
> Chief Livery Inspector Mario Henriques

HEALTH

First confirmed Zika case in Alberta

One case of Zika virus has been confirmed in Alberta this year, though health officials are assuring there's no risk to the public.

In 2015, the virus emerged in South America with "explosive" outbreaks in Brazil and Columbia, according to the World Health Organization.

The one Albertan who contracted the virus received it while travelling, Alberta Health said in a memo. There was also a case of the virus in 2013.

In most people, the Zika virus is transmitted through infected mosquitoes, though experts are investigating a possible link between the Zika infection in pregnant women and infants born with small heads and underdeveloped brains — also known as microcephaly.

Alberta Health said it's important pregnant women discuss their travel plans with their health-care providers, and consider not travelling to areas where Zika is circulating.

The virus has been reported in Brazil, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, French Guyana, Guatemala, Honduras, Martinique, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Puerto Rico, Suriname and Venezuela.

The virus is usually transmitted by infected mosquitoes, as human-to-human transmission is rare, Alberta Health said.

Zika is generally mild, and symptoms last two to seven days. Only one in four people infected with the virus are believed to develop symptoms. METRO

ELSEWHERE

Cases emerging in Canada

Two cases of Zika virus have also been reported in B.C., according to the B.C. Centre for Disease Control, bringing the total number of Canadian cases to three.

The WHO said the pathogen could infect as many as three to four million people within 12 months.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Judge reverses ruling on foreign worker

A judge has reversed an Alberta human rights ruling that found a regulator discriminated against a foreign-trained man who wanted to work as an engineer.

Ladislav Mihaly, from the former Czechoslovakia, had been seeking since 1999 to register with the Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta.

The association required Mihaly to write exams to confirm his credentials, but after failing two tests and refusing to take others he filed a complaint with the Alberta Human Rights Commission in 2008.

In 2014, a human rights tribunal ruled the tests were discriminatory and ordered the association to reconsider Mihaly's application and pay him $10,000 in damages.

The tribunal also required the association to form a committee to review any of his perceived academic deficiencies, to consider exempting him from exams and to provide him with a mentor to guide him into the engineering profession.

Queen's Bench Justice June Ross said the tribunal's ruling contained errors and was unreasonable.

"The tribunal's reasons leading to (the chairman's) conclusion that APEGA could have accommodated Mr. Mihaly and others sharing his characteristics are rife with logical errors, findings of fact that are not supported by evidence and failures to take into account relevant considerations," she wrote.

"I conclude that the decision of the tribunal should be reversed."

The association's CEO, Mark Flint, said the judge's ruling will help protect public safety and confirms its application process is fair.

Flint said if the ruling had been upheld it would have negatively affected the ability of professions that regulate themselves including engineering, medicine, law, dentistry and accounting.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Insp. Brian Whitelaw, superintendent of Public Safety and Enforcement for Calgary Transit stands at the City Hall CTrain Station. HELEN PIKE/ METRO

Riders pay their way

TRANSIT

Compliance study shows all-time high

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

Calgary transit riders are an honest bunch, according to the city.

The most recent annual fare compliance study done by Calgary Transit shows more riders than ever are paying their way. The two-week study was done between Oct. 19, and Nov. 1, 2015 and had peace officers touring CTrains and asking customers for proof of payment. In total, 45,248 customers were checked and, of those, only 786 were unable to show proof of purchase or a pass.

98.3%
...of passengers bought their fare.

An all-time high of 98.3 per cent of passengers proved to be buying tickets or passes. Between 2009 and 2014, the fare evasion average was about 3.6 per cent.

"We had a 1.7 per cent rate of fare evasion at that point in time," said Brian Whitelaw, superintendent of Public Safety and Enforcement for Calgary Transit. "That from the City of Calgary perspective is good news insofar as that is our highest level of fare compliance on the system since we opened the CTrain system."

But along with high compliance, peace officers have also been handing out more tickets — 17,000 fare-related summons this year — which translates to more than 4,800 more than were issued in 2014. Whitelaw said the revenue lost last year was at about $1.2 million where the revenue gained from enforcement totalled almost $1.8 million.

"The number of summonses did go up in 2015; we attribute that to some of our changes in how we deploy our peace officers on the system," said Whitelaw. "The loss is offset through fine revenue."

The city's CTrain fare payment is run on the honour system, with passengers required to purchase single fares or monthly passes. Peace officers regularly check at stations and on trains for fare compliance.

"We use peace officers to conduct proof of payment checks throughout the system. We tend to place our officers at locations where we have higher passenger density," said Whitelaw. "We're generally looking at checkpoints on each of the legs of the system where we typically encounter the greatest number of customers."

According the Calgary Transit, the CTrain carried around 325,000 people every weekday making it the most successful light rail transit system in North America.

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CALGARY'S UNSOLVED KILLINGS

Lucie Edwardson
Metro | Calgary

Each week, Metro explores a few of the 13 homicides from last year not yet solved by the Calgary Police Service. This is the third instalment.

Kallen Carothers

At approximately 11:15 p.m. on Sept. 9, police were called to the area of 16th Avenue and 19th Street N.W. over reports of gunshots. Officers found a car stopped in the south curb lane along eastbound 16th Avenue N.W. at 19th Street. Kallen Carothers, 23, was found in the vehicle in serious, life-threatening condition. She was transported to hospital, where she later died.

Police continue to seek Osman Mohamed of Edmonton as a "person of interest" in Carothers death. It's believed he was a passenger in the vehicle when she was shot, and that he sustained one, if not two, gunshot wounds during the incident.

Osman Mohamed
COURTESY CPS

FACEBOOK

A dark blue, two-door Toyota Yaris with tinted windows is also believed to be connected to the killing.

According to police, there is no indication the incident was gang-related.

Phillip Tu

Calgary police continue to look for three suspects in a fatal August 2015 shooting.

Officers were called to the 600 block of Arbour Lake Drive N.W. on Aug. 27 just before 6 p.m. after reports of multiple gunshots.

A man was found dead upon their arrival. He was identified by family as Hui Xu, also known as Phillip Tu, 42, of Calgary.

Police are also hunting for a suspicious vehicle in the case. The vehicle is described as a 2006-2009 Pontiac Montana SV6 minivan with rear tinted windows. It's believed there was a driver and two masked passengers, all male.

Witnesses have described a hat the driver was wearing as grey and "similar to what Sherlock Holmes might wear" but without earflaps.

Xu was sentenced in 2008 to three years in federal prison after he brokered the sale of 213,000 ecstasy pills.

The Calgary police homicide unit, alongside the guns and gangs unit, are actively investigating Xu's murder. Xu is believed to have been targeted in the attack.

Police believe this is the vehicle driven by the assailants.
COURTESY CPS

Steven Sharda

The 13th homicide victim of the year was 20-year-old Steven Sharda.

Police responded to a report that multiple shots were heard in the 5300 block of Rundlehorn Drive N.E. on July 11.

Upon arrival, police found a vehicle with two occupants inside, both of whom had gunshot wounds.

Sharda was confirmed deceased at the scene, and the other occupant was taken to the hospital in critical condition.

A Crime Stoppers re-enactment took place on Nov. 13 to encourage members of the public to come forward with information.

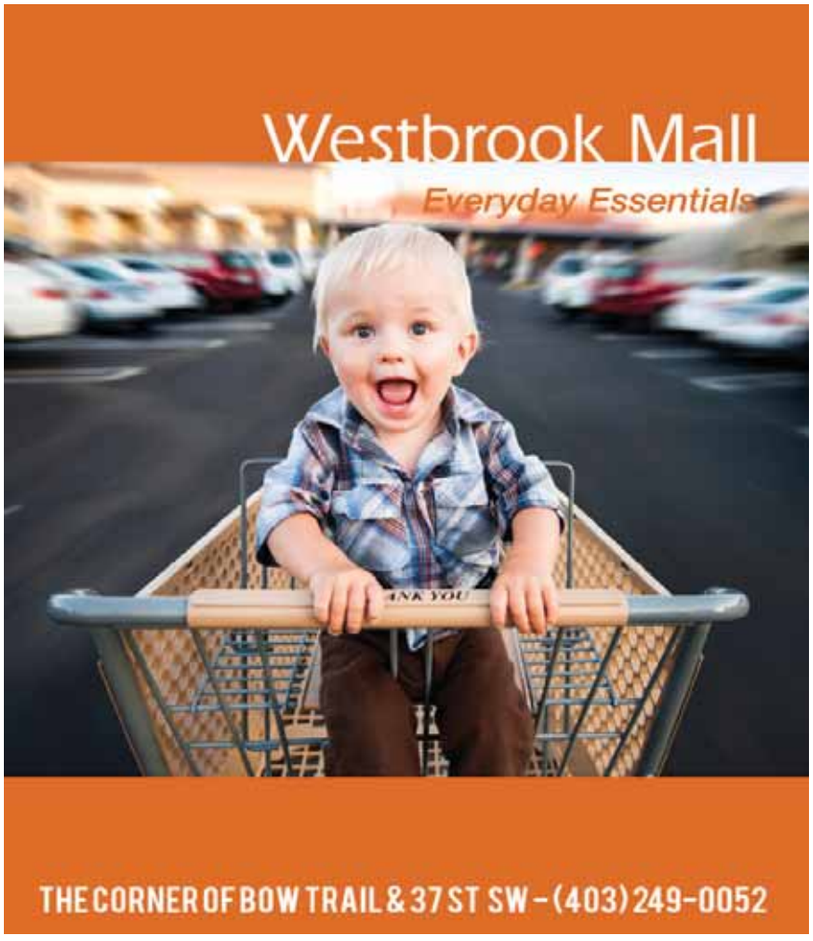
Police believe several people were involved in the incident and hope one or more will come forward and assist police.

The attack is not thought to be random.

FACEBOOK

Calgary police said they don't have any updates on these cases but continue to investigate all three.

Anyone with information is asked to call police at 403-266-1234 or call the Homicide Unit tip line at 403-428-8877. Tips can also be left anonymously by contacting Crime Stoppers.



Andrea Thatcher takes a look at the negative effects of fad diets after pulling herself out of her battle with anorexia. JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

Author shows all diets the door

FOOD

Permission key for nutritionist and former anorexic

Jennifer Friesen
For Metro

After a decade of battling an eating disorder that ruled her life, Andrea Thatcher decided to take the guilt out of eating.

"I was in a prison," she said.

"That's the only way I can describe it. I thought about food all the time: what I wanted to eat, what I shouldn't eat, what I should eat, what I wasn't eating, what I was eating.

"And in the big picture, when I look back, I was abusing my body to seek the approval of total strangers. This is the prison I speak of."

It took years, but Thatcher moved passed her anorexia, and now she's sharing the lessons she learned with others.

The Calgary-based nutritionist, personal trainer and author released a book last summer, In One End and Out the Other, with copies selling across Europe and throughout California.

Turning her back on the common diets that feature "cheat meals" and "treats," Thatcher describes her approach as "permission-based eating."

"I feed my dog treats," she said. "It's dehumanizing. You're not a dog, you're a person. You're not cheating, you're making a choice. You're a human. Eat food."

According to the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada, 39 per cent of Canadians said they followed a diet that restricted certain foods or food groups. Thatcher contests that this cycle of restricting what you eat, and feeling guilty when you fail, creates a "negative relationship with food."

> **"I feed my dog treats. It's dehumanizing. You're not a dog, you're a person. You're not cheating, you're making a choice. You're a human. Eat food.**
> Andrea Thatcher

"I want people to have a sense of permission after seeing me," she said.

"Food shouldn't be a punishment, and it shouldn't be a reward. We all have to eat, it shouldn't be all-or-nothing."

Thatcher is holding a free workshop on Feb. 9 in Calgary. For more information, visit neverdietagain.today.

A Thursday night conference in Calgary discussed potential changes to how math is taught in Albertan schools.
AARON CHATHA/METRO

Test scores don't add up

EDUCATION

Parents meet with experts to discuss how to teach math

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

Final exam scores dropped for Grade 9 students in Alberta this year, and parents are questioning whether more could be done at home, or if changes are needed in the curriculum.

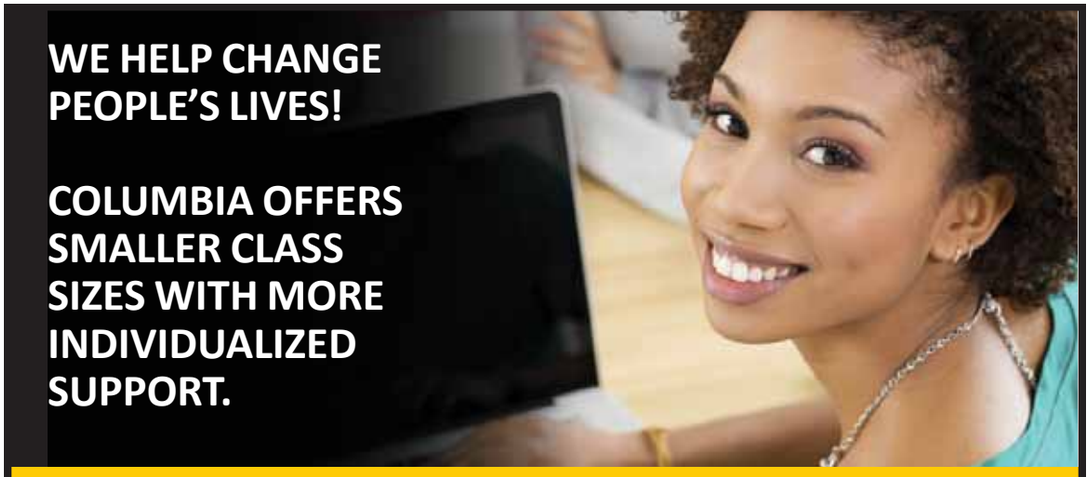
Lana Stewart's oldest son is struggling with math, and Stewart said she's struggling to help him.

"You need to work to kids' strengths," she said. "Some kids can memorize easier than others, some kids need more manipulations — which is new math.

"I think you need a combination of the two, and I think they've kind of left the parents out of the equation. Because the way I learned math is not the way my children are learning math, so it's hard for me to help them."

Lisa Davis, president of CAPSC, a Calgary parent group, held a math conference for kids and educators on Thursday evening to discuss potential changes. Math experts at the event suggested changes to the curriculum, such as teaching fractions at a younger age.

"I know there is a working group at the Alberta government that's looking at that right now, and we're kind of waiting with bated breath to find out what their conclusions are and whether they'll be looking at making changes," said Davis.



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DISEASE CONTROL

AHS warns about measles exposure

Alberta Health Services (AHS) is warning the public of potential exposures to measles in Calgary.

British Columbia health officials advised AHS that an individual with lab-confirmed measles visited three locations, including a WestJet flight.

People at those locations — during specific time periods — may have been exposed, AHS warned.

The locations and times periods include:

- Forbidden City Dim Sum & Seafood, 999-36 St NE on Jan. 15 from 6 to 10:30 p.m.
- Waterfront Condos, 222 Riverfront Avenue SW, through Jan. 15-18, from 12 a.m. to 10 a.m.
- Calgary International Airport on Jan. 18 from 10 a.m. to1:30 p.m.
- WestJet Flight WS287 from Calgary to Vancouver — the flight departed at 11:35 a.m.

You are at risk if you were in those locations during those time frames, born after 1970, have not already had measles, or didn't receive two doses of the measles vaccine.

AHS is asking those people to monitor their symptoms, which include a fever, cough, runny noise, red eyes, and a red blotchy rash that appears three to seven days after the fever starts.

Measles is extremely contagious and spreads through the air. There's no treatment, but can be prevented through immunization. METRO

Alberta Health Services is warning Calgarians of possible exposure to measles. METRO FILE

FUGITIVE

Police ask for help locating dangerous man

The Calgary Police Service is asking for the public's help to locate a man wanted in connection with multiple violent offences.

Noel Antonio Reinosa, also known as Noel Reinosa-Carreno, has warrants issued for his arrest in connection with several assaults, uttering threats, and breaching court orders.

Police believe Reinosa is actively avoiding arrest and poses a significant risk to a former domestic partner.

CPS first asked for public assistance to locate Reinosa last month, but they now believe Reinosa followed his former partner to a CTrain station on Tuesday, where it is believed that he assaulted her and threatened her with a weapon.

Police urgently need to locate Reinosa following this incident.

Reinosa is described as a 22-year-old Hispanic male, five-foot-seven, with a medium build, brown eyes and black hair. METRO

From left: Sarah Edington, Maggie Ou, Jerry Tseng and Sameera Gumma from last year's Robert Thirsk High School Film Club. HELEN PIKE/METRO

Returning fest helps rising stars

FILMMAKING

School's film club launches second annual event, contest

Helen Pike
Metro | Calgary

Young filmmakers looking to dive into the industry can give making movies a go thanks to a returning festival that calls Calgary its home.

After a successful first year of film festival organization, the kids in Students at Robert Thirsk High School's Film Club are launching a second Rising Star International Film Festival.

The aptly named event takes submissions from students across the globe in short film categories as well as commercial categories and sticks a crew of Canadian industry professionals into the mix to judge submissions and decide on winners.

This year 14 students are working on the festival as an extracurricular project.

> **It's a really good event to get experience.**
> Matthew O'Connor

This is Matthew O'Connor's first year in film club, and he's already hard at work submitting a film of his own — a thriller. He said his five-minute work took a whole month this summer to schedule and shoot.

"It's a really good event to get experience and the judges are all really good to have judge your work," O'Connor said.

"These guys really know what they're doing, so it's really invaluable to have that kind of feedback, especially on something you put together yourself."

Jerry Tseng, now an alumnus of the club, said last year's festival was a complete success. With submissions from around the world, there was a huge variety at the startup of their festival.

"Last year we got an audience of about 100 people, so this year we're hoping it will become bigger just because of our success from last year," Tseng said.

The festival has opened its call for submissions which can be submitted online at risingstarfilmfest.com by Feb. 8. The festival and award ceremony will take place Feb. 25.

POLICE

Review mental health cases: Justice minister

Alberta's justice minister is hoping the province can improve how police handle people with mental health issues.

Pressure on law enforcement has increased after David McQueen, who was suffering from depression, was shot and killed by Calgary police on Sunday.

McQueen had been randomly firing shots out of his home, and one narrowly missed a Calgary Transit driver.

Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley answered questions about the incident following a presentation today at the Canadian Bar Association conference in Calgary.

She said the Alberta Association of Chiefs of Police asked the province to look into the issue in March 2015 and a mental health advisory committee is preparing a report, which is expected in the coming weeks.

> **Many people struggle without seeking treatment, or without us knowing that they're struggling.**
> Justice Minister Kathleen Ganley

As for McQueen's death, Ganley said she couldn't comment on whether there will be a fatality inquiry.

"At this time, ASIRT is still investigating, so I think it would be premature to guess where the process is going before we have the outcome of that investigation," she said.

She said it's difficult to determine how many police shootings involve people with mental illness. THE CANADIAN PRESS

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Biz to look at gender at work

EQUITY

Program head is turning her research into a business

Aaron Chatha
Metro | Calgary

The culture at some of Calgary's top companies is causing them to lose female employees — and one women's studies expert is reversing the trend the best way she can: by getting incorporated.

Rebecca Sullivan, director of the Women's Studies Program at the University of Calgary, formed Gender @ Work after oil and gas companies came to her for help in retaining female employees.

"As a researcher, it's my job to always be current in my field of expertise," she said, adding her position with the university allows her to be very upfront with clients.

Sullivan is applying her research to the real world in an area that needs help. According to a Statistics Canada report, women often begin their career earning on average 75 per cent of men, but during their peak child years, that drops to 60.6 per cent.

She said much of this has to do with employers looking for someone who is the right fit for their company, when they should be looking for diversity.

"To me, the scariest word coming out of any leader's mouth is 'fit,'" she explained. "When they say we're looking for people who fit our culture, I ask a lot of questions about how are you defining fit."

She said many organizations define "fit" as someone who looks, talks, acts and has similar experiences and histories as them.

As a result, when it comes to tapping employees for leadership opportunities, those who get selected often mirror the person doing the tapping —overwhelmingly white, male and from similar socio-economic backgrounds, according to Sullivan.

Rebecca Sullivan started Gender @ Work to use her university research to help Calgary companies retain female employees.
COURTESY RILEY BRANDT/UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

This is what causes not only women, but other diverse employees to seek employment elsewhere. It also locks the company culture into looking at issues with only one perspective — which is what companies hoped to avoid through diversifying in the first place.

Gender @ Work is the result of a partnership with Innovate Calgary, which is hoping to spur more educators and researchers to build their work into social enterprises, so they have more application and longevity beyond just the classroom.

> **To me, the scariest word coming out of any leader's mouth is 'fit.'**
> Rebecca Sullivan

"There aren't many universities in North America doing very much about these issues," said Ken Porter, Innovate Calgary VP of intellectual property management.

"A lot of people are just thinking about the products, and the not the services that these enterprises can deliver."

POLICE

Charges pending in December shooting

A man has been arrested in relation to a December shooting.

At approximately 9:50 p.m. on Dec. 13, 2015, two men were sitting in their vehicle in the 0-100 block of Coral Springs Close NE, when a silver Dodge Caravan came into the area and stopped near the victims. A man got out of the van and fired four rounds into the victim's vehicle before fleeing the scene.

Two other rounds were found to have gone into two nearby homes. No injuries were reported.

After an investigation by the guns and gangs unit, a 19-year-old man from Calgary is facing multiple weapons-related charges.

His name will be released once charges have been laid.

Police say the investigation is continuing and further charges may be laid.

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Alberta's finance minister Joe Ceci said he's hoping to discuss Alberta's finances with his federal counterpart, including possible money from a little-know federal program. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Alberta may qualify for federal cash injection

ECONOMY

Province could get payout as resource revenue drops

The Liberal government is eyeing a little-known federal program as it searches for ways to help Alberta cope with the financial squeeze of sinking commodity prices.

The Alberta government is bracing for a steep fall in revenues in 2015-16 due to sliding resource prices, which could result in the province qualifying for cash relief from Ottawa through the so-called fiscal stabilization program.

Provinces can make claims under the program when their revenues tumble by more than five per cent from one year to the next.

But at roughly $250 million, the maximum withdrawal Alberta can claim under the program's current formula is relatively modest for the province's economy. Payouts were capped in the late 1980s at $60 per provincial resident; Alberta's population is about 4.1 million.

A fiscal-stabilization payment is just one of several possibilities Ottawa is exploring as it hunts for ways to ease the pain of hard-hit Alberta, said a senior government source who spoke on condition of anonymity.

As it draws up its spring budget, the federal government has instructed bureaucrats across many departments to come up with "innovative ideas" to help the Alberta economy, said the source, who wasn't authorized to disclose details publicly.

With the federal budget's release expected in March, and the province's treasury facing pressure, the clock is ticking.

The source said potential solutions being floated include speeding up infrastructure spending and tweaking the typical, per-capita infrastructure funding disbursement formula to reflect economic need. Another possibility under consideration is a boost to direct transfers to individuals, perhaps through adjustments to the employment insurance program.

The Liberal government pledged to enhance EI during last fall's election campaign and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has pledged to pump an additional $60 billion over 10 years into infrastructure projects. However, only $17.4 billion was earmarked to flow during the Liberals' first four-year mandate.

Next week, Trudeau is scheduled to visit Alberta, where the Liberals had an electoral breakthrough in October by winning four ridings.

Before that, the party hadn't won a seat in the province since 2004.

Alberta Finance Minister Joe Ceci told The Canadian Press that he's hoping to discuss his province's battered books with his federal counterpart, Bill Morneau.

$250M

Alberta can claim a maximum of $250 million under the fiscal stabilization program.

"Certainly, I'm aware that there are some things that we could be following up with together to possibly improve the situation temporarily around the availability of federal monies," Ceci said Wednesday.

"I would just discuss finances with (Morneau) and I'm interested in seeing if there's any possibility we can count on federal monies in the near term that would help us through this difficult time."

Ceci didn't get into specifics, but when asked whether he might ask Ottawa for a loan, he replied: "Yeah, potentially."

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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A role that defies restraints

SCENE YYC

Actor takes on Ellery Queen, the conductor of his own tale

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

Tyrell Crews plays Ellery Queen in Vertigo Theatre's Calamity Town. JENNIFER FRIESEN/FOR METRO

Tyrell Crews feels like he lucked out to play Ellery Queen.

Crews, a local actor whose resumé includes Theatre Calgary and popular TV shows, is playing the famous fictional detective and author in Vertigo Theatre's rendition of the novel Calamity Town, originally penned by — you guessed it — Ellery Queen, the pseudonym for real-life writing duo Manfed B. Lee and Frederic Dannay.

Vertigo's co-director Craig Hall called Crews to play the part. Hall always had him in mind to play the lead role.

"I was just flattered," Crews said.

And unlike your usually dusty drawing-room mystery play, Calamity Town escapes from reality, occurring over the course of months.

The story begins in 1940. The depression has ended, and hope returns to the now-booming New England town of Wrightsville, where Ellery Queen looks for inspiration for his newest novel. Classically, poisonings and murder are on the menu. All he can do is wait for the crime to come to him.

Ellery remains on stage the entire time, acting as the narrator while jumping into scenes. He controls what you see, forcing the scene to shift.

For Crews, it's been tough at times.

"You take what's given, what's said about this character and what he says about himself," he said. "You see what makes him tick."

But before the actors delved into their scripts, Hall reached out to Calamity Town's playwright Joseph Goodrich.

In fact, Calamity Town sat in a soon-to-be-picked-up pile curated by former Vertigo director Mark Bellamy.

So when Bellamy handed over the Vertigo reins, he recommended Hall dial Goodrich to make Calamity Town happen.

"He actually pointed Calamity Town was one of the most interesting," Hall said. "I've been trying to program it every year since. It's a big show for us."

Goodrich was thrilled to learn Vertigo would pick up his play. He was at the New York Public Library when he got the news.

"I could've just screamed, but you know you can't really do that there," he said with a laugh. "I was delighted because Craig had worked so hard for a number of years to make it happen. I hope it's a relationship that continues."

DETAILS

Calamity Town plays Friday at 7:30 p.m. and runs until Feb. 21. Tickets start at $25.

Goodrich, also a mystery writer, said the real-life duo behind Ellery Queen were quite influential.

For him, it's a way to re-invigorate the popular mystery books. In fact, they were out of circulation until recently.

"Their work and their creation of Ellery Queen has come back into some prominence, which I think they really really deserve," Goodrich said. "They're some of the greatest world mysteries ever written."

Unlike Lee and Dannay's other novels, much of Ellery Queen's character is revealed in Calamity Town. You learn of his love interest and how he reacts when love is or isn't involved.

"Joe's done a wonderful job bringing the theatrics out of this novel," Crews said.

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Michael Bernard Fitzgerald CONTRIBUTED

Tapping into raw honesty

SCENE YYC

Calgary musician opens up about his new album

Jeremy Simes
For Metro | Calgary

Michael Bernard Fitzgerald is pulling too many strings to count in his latest record, I Wanna Make It With You.

The Calgary native's newest rock-like record is faster and darker — sounds that could get you a speeding ticket.

Metro talked to Fitzgerald about his breakup, rough times on the road and "love lost" lyrical theme.

He performs all 17 tracks from I Wanna Make It With You at the Jack Singer on Saturday at 8 p.m. Tickets are still available and the album comes out March 11.

Tell me about this "love lost" theme in I Wanna Make It With You.

Throughout the process of the making the record, I'd gone through a breakup. The songs described where I was at, but I found they were kind of open-ended.

So would you say this is your breakup album then?

I would never call it a breakup album. I'm so thankful I got to experience all the feelings that allowed me to write this. To live in some of this stuff took a toll.

What stuff?

It's an uneasy time. It'd be easier to close it off, be safe and feel not exposed. But I knew staying in that was probably where I would find a lot of this music. I remember this trip to L.A. I was supposed to be there for 14 days of co-writes. I think I only showed up for maybe one session. Things were hard, you know? I wore out a pair of Nike's walking six hours a day. I'm just thankful we got to create stuff out of that.

That's great — you get really good stuff out of that, I think.

Yeah. And none of it is contrived — I can't sing any of those lyrics without going to a place or a feeling. It's not like you're singing something that sounds good or looks good on paper. These are songs where, 'This one destroyed me' and, 'This is the day I flew here and I shouldn't have and I just flew right back.'

Is it your most realistic album then?

No, I think it's as accurate to that period of time. I just did honestly what I was at the time. This is just the continuation of that process.

WEEKEND EVENTS

FRIDAY

The Little Prince — The Musical

Theatre Calgary is presenting the world premiere of The Little Prince, a musical based on the well-loved book by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. The Little Prince tells the story of a pilot who crashes his plane in the Sahara Desert and then meets a young prince from an asteroid. Show's at 8 p.m. and prices vary.

SATURDAY

Exposure Photography Festival

This month-long celebration is located in three cities: Calgary, Canmore and Banff. The festival encourages participation in photography and appreciation for the craft. See beautifully captured images of cityscapes, landscapes and people. Times for exhibitions are throughout the day and can be found at exposurephotofestival.com. Prices vary.

Die tote Stadt

The Calgary opera is bringing this Canadian premiere to the Southern Alberta Jubilee Auditorium. A man is struggling to remain sane as he falls deeper in love with a woman who looks similar to his young wife, who recently died. Show starts at 8 p.m., and prices begin at $30.

SUNDAY

Haircuts by Children

Would you trust an eight-year-old to cut your hair? Well, this performance is exactly that: children ages eight to 12 are trained by professionals to cut hair. And after all that training, they're ready to give you a haircut. To book an appointment, go online at haircutsbychildren.bpt.me. The free event runs from 12 to 4 p.m. JEREMY SIMES/FOR METRO

Legal pot could reap $5B a year

TAXES

Economist's estimate based on curtailing illegal sales

Call it Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's secret stash.

A new report from CIBC World Markets says Canada's federal and provincial governments could reap as much as $5 billion annually in tax revenues from the sale of legal marijuana.

CIBC economist Avery Shenfeld crunched the numbers using current estimates of Canadian recreational pot consumption, the revenue experience in U.S. states that have legalized, and other factors — such as prevailing "sin tax" rates on alcohol and tobacco.

"The bottom line is that federal (and) provincial governments might reap as much as $5 billion from legalization, but only if all the underground sales are effectively curtailed," writes Shenfeld.

"That's on the order of 0.25 per cent of GDP, no barnburner."

The Liberal government has promised to legalize, tax and regulate marijuana and has made MP Bill Blair, the former Toronto police chief, the lead on investigating a new regulatory model.

Trudeau maintains that legalized pot will not be a cash cow, and that all revenues will be used to address mental health and addictions issues.

> It was never about a money-maker, it was always about public health. Prime Minister Justin Trudeau

"It was never about a money-maker, it was always about public health, public safety," the prime minister said in December during a year-end interview.

The experience of Colorado and Washington states, where pot sales were legalized and taxed, suggests no dramatic increase in marijuana usage but a potential for pot tourism.

"The desirability of increased marijuana tourism inflows will be questioned, no doubt, but they would generate additional fiscal revenues for government on their other tourist spending," Shenfeld writes.

The report uses Colorado sales figures to estimate a Canadian pot market worth about $10 billion annually, then looks at net profit margins from Ontario's government booze monopoly and other associated income and payroll taxes to come up with the revenue total.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

PATRICK SIMMS VIA FACEBOOK

Tory selfie

1 The nation's former PM, who's dropped off the political map following his electoral defeat, was spotted in the Calgary airport Wednesday. He took a minute to snap a selfie with a passerby who recognized him. Patrick Simms posted the photo to Facebook, saying he knocked (Harper's) phone out of his hand when going to shake it."

2 Harper is no stranger to selfies. While not as savvy as the current PM, he's still made the rounds on social media. In this shot from Jan. 30, Harper is pictured with Canada's women's water polo team.

KATRINA MONTON VIA TWITTER

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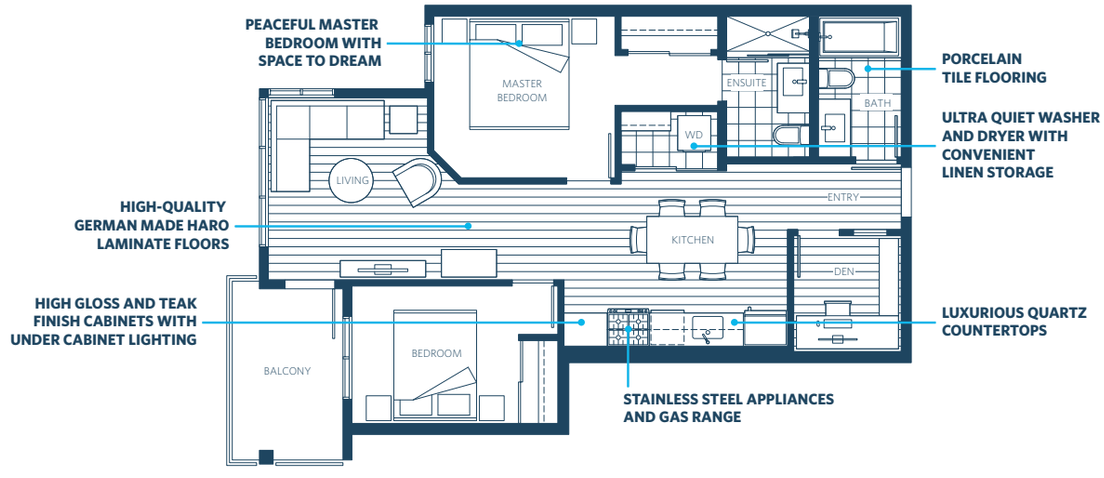

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TRANSPORT ROW

Famed cellist blasts airline's instrument rule as 'indefensible'

Thandi Fletcher
Metro | Vancouver

A renowned American cellist says he is "outraged" after hearing that WestJet refused to allow a young musician's cello in the cabin during a recent flight from Vancouver, even though he bought an extra seat for the instrument.

Nearly four years ago, Paul Katz says he received the same treatment. "I get angry," he told Metro. "I just think WestJet is so indefensible, and their attitude is so cavalier. They're just so out of step with the industry."

Earlier this month, Juilliard School cellist Nathan Chan attempted to bring his cello onto a flight from Vancouver to Toronto but was refused by the airline.

Nathan Chan says WestJet refused to allow his cello in the cabin during a flight to Toronto earlier this month. CONTRIBUTED

The 22-year-old bought his ticket through American Airlines, which allows passengers travelling with a cello to buy an extra seat for the instrument. When he arrived at the airport, however, he found out that the flight was operated by Calgary-based airline WestJet, and was forced leave the instrument behind with family and forfeit his $250 US ticket for the extra seat.

According to WestJet, the airline is "not licensed to carry anything in its seats that requires a specialized strap or other device to attach it to a seat."

American cellist Paul Katz.

But Katz, who said he has taken his cello on more than 200 flights a year, argues that WestJet seems to be one of the only airlines in North America with such a policy.

Metro reached out to WestJet about its carry-on baggage policy for large instruments, but the company refused to comment.

PRIVACY

Spy agency broke laws on metadata

Canada's electronic spy agency broke privacy laws by sharing information about Canadians with foreign partners, says a federal watchdog.

The Communications Security Establishment passed along the information — known as metadata — to counterparts in the United States, Britain, Australia and New Zealand, said Jean-Pierre Plouffe, who keeps an eye on the highly secretive agency.

Metadata is information associated with a communication — such as a telephone number or email address — but not the message itself.

The Ottawa-based CSE uses highly advanced technology to intercept, sort and analyze foreign communications for information of intelligence interest to the federal government.

"No Canadian should need to fear that their private information is being handed to foreign agencies by their own government," said Laura Tribe, a digital rights specialist with OpenMedia, a group that advocates Internet privacy.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

CHINA

Canadian is indicted on espionage charges

China's official news agency says a Canadian who was detained more than a year ago has been indicted on accusations of spying for Canada and stealing state secrets.

Xinhua says Kevin Garratt was indicted by prosecutors in Dandong city, near China's border with North Korea, where the former Vancouver man and his wife ran a popular coffee shop and conducted Christian aid work.

The Xinhua report says that Chinese authorities found evidence implicating Garratt in accepting tasks from "Canadian espionage agencies." THE CANADIAN PRESS

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WEB CULTURE

Mumbai police become a hit on Twitter

A witty tweet from Mumbai police. The police service's new anti-drug campaign has gone viral in a string of word play. TWITTER

Mumbai police are on a roll.

In the month since they debuted on Twitter, the police and its chief of police have been firing up a storm of punfilled, witty warnings on abiding traffic rules, on women's safety and even on how to be safe online.

And on Wednesday, the police service's new anti-drug campaign went viral in a string of word play.

"If you roll, we will weed you out," read one message that was retweeted thousands of times. Then came: "Be a hero without 'heroin.'" A couple of hours later there was a cheeky question: "Hi! Have you 'meth' us?" with the hashtag #HoshMeinAao, which means wake up. One tweet had a picture of white powder on ground with the letters LSD and the message: "Let's Stop Drugs."

Giddy Twitter users in India gave a thumbs-up to the police service — a rarity in that country.

"Mumbai police account is giving Twitter standup comedians a good run for their money," said one user. Another tweeted: "Ok, Mumbai Police just killed it. The rest of you, go home."

#MumbaiPolice trended on Twitter in India all Wednesday.

The Twitter campaign was applauded not just for its clever use of words, but also for getting an important message across without being preachy or pedantic. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

A Health Secretary employee fumigates against mosquito Aedes Aegypti mosquito outside houses in Cali, Colombia. LUIS ROBAYO/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Zika virus spreading

OUTBREAK

Health experts may declare international emergency

Declaring that the Zika virus is "spreading explosively," the World Health Organization announced it will hold an emergency meeting of independent experts Monday to decide if the outbreak should be declared an international health emergency.

At a special meeting Thursday in Geneva, WHO Director-General Dr. Margaret Chan said the virus - which has been linked to birth defects and neurological problems - was becoming much more of a threat. One WHO scientist said the Americas could see up to 4 million cases of Zika in the next year.

Chan said although there was no definitive proof that the Zika virus was responsible for a spike in the number of babies being born with abnormally small heads in Brazil, "the level of alarm is extremely high." She also noted a possible relationship between Zika infections and Guillain-Barre syndrome, which can cause temporary paralysis.

The Zika virus was first detected in 1947 and for decades only caused mild disease, but Chan noted that "the situation today is dramatically different." According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control, the Zika virus is now in more than 20 countries, mostly in Central and South America. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BLOOD BAN

Canada adopts new donor restrictions in wake of virus

Canadian Blood Services will soon refuse blood donations from those who have travelled to countries where the Zika virus spread.

Chief medical and scientific officer Dr. Dana Devine says the blood collection agency will decide in the next few days which travel destinations would be linked to a temporary ban. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Brazil to wage war on mosquitoes

Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff has invited all nations in Latin America and the Caribbean to discuss ways to join forces to cope with the rapid spread of the Zika virus and declared war on the mosquito that carries it.

On Twitter, Rousseff said "we must declare war on the Aedes aegypti mosquito" that carries the virus, a war that will focus on eliminating the insect's breeding grounds until a vaccine is developed. "We are going to focus on eliminating all the pools of standing water where the Aedes live and reproduce," she tweeted. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Seven dead in Yemen suicide bombing

TERRORISM

Islamic State group claims responsibility for carnage

The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) affiliate in Yemen has claimed responsibility for a suicide bombing Thursday that killed seven people and targeted the presidential palace in Aden, where the internationally recognized president and his cabinet are based.

In an online statement posted on Twitter by the group's supporters, ISIL identified the attacker as Abu Hanifa al-Hollandi, an Arabic nom de guerre that suggests he was Dutch. The last name in militants' pseudonyms usually indicates their nationality or place of origin. His real name was not immediately known.

It was not possible to verify the claim. The group posted pictures that appeared to show the car bomb speeding toward cement barricades manned by presidential guards.

Earlier Thursday, three Al-Jazeera journalists who were kidnapped in the war-ravaged Yemeni city of Taiz were released, the news network said in a statement. Journalists have been frequently targeted during Yemen's conflict, which pits southern Shiite rebels, known as Houthis, against government forces backed by a Saudi-led military campaign.

The Houthis seized control of the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, in September 2014 and in November that year the president fled to Aden.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

A crater made by a car bomb attack in Yemen on Thursday.

WAEL QUBADY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NORTHEAST U.S.

Snowstorm one for the record books

Last weekend's crippling blizzard was the fourth most powerful snowstorm to hit the Northeast U.S. in at least 66 years, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Thursday.

The agency gave the storm a rating of 7.66 on the Northeast Snowfall Impact Scale, which ranks storms according to inches of snowfall, geographic reach and population affected. That bumps down to No. 5 the Presidents Day weekend storm of 2003, which had a score of 7.50.

The blizzard last Friday through Sunday affected 102.8 million people and covered about 434,000 square miles in 26 states, NOAA spokeswoman Maureen O'Leary said.

Almost 24 million people saw more than 20 inches of snow and 1.5 million got more than 30 inches, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Paul Kocin, who helped develop the scale. He called the storm a slightly smaller version of a January 1996 blizzard, No. 2 on the list, which covered a similar area.

The scale doesn't take into account other misery metrics, such as storm-related deaths, flight cancellations and power outages.

At least 52 people in 11 states and the District of Columbia died in storm-related incidents including car accidents, carbon monoxide poisoning and heart attacks while shovelling snow.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Residents of the Capitol Hill neighborhood in Washington, D.C., work to clean snow off after last weekend's snow dump.

CHIP SOMODEVILLA//GETTY IMAGES

IN BRIEF

Armed Oregon standoff down to four holdouts

The armed takeover of an Oregon wildlife refuge dwindled Thursday to just four holdouts demanding assurances they will not be arrested by the FBI if they surrender.

The FBI had no immediate comment on the negotiations or the holdouts' demands, saying only that it was trying to "empty the refuge of the armed occupiers in the safest way possible."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Terror strikes Nigeria again

Multiple suicide bombings have killed 15 civilians and a soldier in the Nigerian town of Chibok, where Boko Haram extremists kidnapped scores of schoolgirls almost two years ago, local leaders said Thursday.

Ten people were evacuated for better medical care but the town's small hospital still is overwhelmed, Dr. Idrissa Danladi told The Associated Press by telephone.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Barbie's got new body types

TOYS

Kudos from Canadians for curvy, tall and petite dolls

As a black woman raising her eldest daughter through the mid-'80s and '90s, Samantha Kemp-Jackson found little variety among dolls when it came to different shapes, skin tones and abilities — especially with Barbies.

"It was, for the most part, the stereotypical Barbie with the blond hair and the disproportionate body proportions," recalls the mother of four. "It always made me a bit uncomfortable because as a woman and as a parent I thought: 'What is this teaching my daughter?'

"If she doesn't conform to what this Barbie looks like, is that going to result in her having issues about herself and her body and not being beautiful? Because Barbie was touted as the ideal representation of beauty in a doll."

With Mattel's announcement Thursday that its iconic plastic plaything will now include tall, curvy and petite body types, Kemp-Jackson joins other Canadians applauding the move by the toy manufacturer to better reflect diversity among females.

The new additions to the Barbie Fashionista doll range include seven skin tones, 22 eye colours and 24 hairstyles.

The shift comes after years of criticism of Barbie for reinforcing unrealistic body proportions and beauty ideals for girls.

Michael Bach, CEO of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, said he's excited at the prospect of giving a doll to his 2-1/2-year-old biracial niece who can "see herself in it." The fact that it's Barbie makes it all the more noteworthy given the doll's longevity and status, he added.

"Barbie is an icon. She's been around for 55 years," he said. "This has incredible impact because it is Barbie.

Akram Sharkawy, brand communications marketing manager at Mattel, said the new dolls will be available at stores in Canada at the end of February.

The dolls can be viewed and ordered online at shop.mattel.com.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

Some of the new Barbies introduced this month. The dolls now come in three new body types: tall, curvy and petite, and in seven skin tones, 22 eye colours. COURTESY MATTEL/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

MCDONALD'S

Breakfast menu growing

Basking in the fanfare over its all-day breakfast menu, McDonald's is pushing its operational limits by testing the addition of another morning favourite to the lineup: the McGriddle.

The world's biggest burger chain plans to start offering an expanded all-day breakfast menu that adds McGriddle and biscuit sandwiches in 72 restaurants in Tulsa, Oklahoma starting Feb. 1. The test comes after customers complained about the absence of the McGriddle when McDonald's launched a limited all-day breakfast menu in October.

McDonald's is riding high from its biggest quarterly U.S. sales jump in nearly four years, boosted by all-day breakfast menu and unseasonably warm weather.

Despite McDonald's recent sales jump, it's still not clear exactly how all-day breakfast is benefiting the chain and whether the effects will last. The company did not say how much of the increase was from an uptick in customer visits, versus factors likes price hikes or people adding extras onto their orders.

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A Director, under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act will make an application for: **Permanent Guardianship Order**; of your child born on **December 4, 2014**. If you wish to speak to this matter in court, you MUST appear in court on this date. You do have the right to be represented by a lawyer. If you do not attend in person or by a lawyer, an Order may be made in your absence and the Judge may make a different Order than the one being applied for by the Director. You will be bound by any Order the Judge makes.

You have the right to appeal the Order within 30 days from the date the Order is made.

Contact: Yvonne Blackwater or Pauline John
Stoney Nakoda Child & Family Services
Phone: (403) 558-2169

MONEY MONITOR

Talk to kids about cash: Experts

Experts say when it comes to talking about money with children, the earlier the better.

Gary Rabbior, president and chief executive of the Canadian Foundation for Economic Education, suggests children as young as three or four can start learning some of the basics.

One of the earliest and most important lessons children can learn is that every decision you make with money involves a trade-off. "Part of the parenting dilemma which starts at a very young age is, how do you tell a kid they can't have everything they want?" he says.

"When you buy something or make a decision about one thing, you're giving up the opportunity for something else and we really advocate that as one of the most early learning experiences because that concept of trade-offs helps kids understand they can't have everything they want."

Learning to distinguish the difference between needs and wants is a key lesson.

Natasha Nystrom of the Financial Consumer Agency of Canada says once children start counting, it may be time to begin introducing some of the concepts about money, including the different coins and bills.

THE CANADIAN PRESS

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METRO CALL TO ACTION

Rainbow-coloured #PrideTape

Somewhere over the rainbow, there will be progress in hockey. What if an inspiring show of inclusiveness by one NHL team became a national movement towards greater acceptance of LGBTQ people participating in team sports? Let's make it happen.

Sticking it to prejudice

Last week, the Edmonton Oilers rainbow-taped their hockey sticks for their annual skills competition, to show support for LGBTQ youth. The idea came from another Edmontonian — Kris Wells — who's created Pride Tape in an effort to make Canada's beloved sport a safer space for all who love the game.

Wells, a professor at the University of Alberta, notes there are still no out players in the NHL, and that for inclusiveness to sweep through hockey, the message has to come from the top.

"Change is going to take captains, coaches and community members stepping forward," Wells said. "Pride Tape says, without having to say the words, that 'I'm an ally.'"

A movement is made

Pride Tape is an initiative of the Institute for Sexual Minority Studies and Services at the University of Alberta, which has a Kickstarter campaign underway to make 10,000 rolls of the rainbow-coloured tape. The Oilers Community Foundation made an $8,000 donation to the campaign and players also had it on their sticks Sunday.

Oilers defenceman Andrew Ference and his team showed their support for Pride Tape on Sunday. RYAN TUMILTY/METRO

Hometown pride

The Calgary Flames have confirmed they are looking to acquire some of the pride tape. Flames president Brian Burke is a strong supporter of the pride movement. His son, Brendan, was openly gay but died in a car crash in 2010. Burke has since co-founded the You Can Play Project, which advocates for gay athletes in sports.

We think all of Canada's pro and amateur hockey teams should get on board with Pride Tape. If you agree, share this story online and post on social media: #PrideTape

What reconciliation looks like in real life

Genna Buck
Metro | Toronto

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission calls on the federal government to close gaps in education, employment and health outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians.

I've been thinking about how those gaps can be identified and closed. How to improve, concretely, the lives of indigenous people, with those communities' full participation, and with respect for their heritage, knowledge and right to self-government.

To get an idea of how this can be done, in a way that is guided by scientific evidence, look at Oklahoma.

That U.S. state is home to the Cherokee Nation, which suffers a disproportionately high rate of cancers related to tobacco use. The University of Oklahoma began working with the Cherokee to address this issue, and the National Institute of Health helped out to the tune of $1.5 million.

Cherokee people themselves will be monitoring cancer cases and their outcomes from the nation's in-house health-research office.

The general ideas are to find interventions to reduce cancer and help the office develop research capacity, but nothing is being decided by the university and dictated to the tribe, said Paul Spicer, an anthropologist and the lead researcher on the project. A joint committee — half Cherokee, half from the university — is setting the research agenda.

This is extremely exciting. It's ground-up, but still science-based. I can imagine a similar approach being used to address many issues, from early childhood education to the management of fish stocks.

It doesn't seem that hard. Why aren't we doing it in every indigenous community in Canada? I asked my friend Rebecca Benson, who is Haudenosaunee and a young professional with a deep understanding of the social problems in indigenous communities.

She was positive about research-based problem-solving, but she had a word of caution. We don't have a single indigenous community with anywhere near the population and clout of the Cherokee Nation's 300,000 people. Many, though not all, Canadian reserves are in a chronic state of crisis, she said. An ambitious collaborative science project isn't realistic when hunger is rampant and there's just been a cluster of youth suicides.

It seems to me that there aren't the human resources available, in many cases, to have a collaboration, Oklahoma-style, where the local indigenous people and scientists are on truly equal footing.

And when the majority of the researchers are not part of the community, the thorny issue of consent becomes all that much more important.

That's what Benson emphasized most: the need for indigenous groups to give their consent for research in their communities and on their lands. Not cursory, one-time consent, but continuous consent, with the option to withdraw if they decide the research isn't benefiting them.

There is participatory research going on in indigenous communities in Canada, but as reconciliation efforts begin in earnest and we try to close those gaps, there needs to be more. Because if we base policies on evidence, they have a shot of working.

Genna Buck is a science writer and a section editor at Metro. Follow her on Twitter @genna_buck.

ROSEMARY WESTWOOD
metroview

Anger alone can't fix what ails La Loche. But it would help.

Not worth the money.

That's how Cindy Blackstock described the Canadian government's attitude toward indigenous children.

As the director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society, she's been at the centre of a nine-year battle that culminated Tuesday with the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal's ruling that the federal government discriminates against indigenous children.

The tribunal found reserves receive 22 per cent to 34 per cent less child welfare funding than everyone else. It slammed the government over the high proportion of indigenous children in foster care (nearly half of those under 14 years old, according to the 2013 National Household Survey).

The ruling addresses a fraction of the scandal that is indigenous people's living conditions. There's a lack of clean water and quality housing; indigenous youth suicide rates are at least five times higher than the national average.

All these issues have surfaced in the media in the wake of the La Loche shooting, prompting concerns over negative, one-sided depictions of remote communities. La Loche's former mayor and current MP Georgina Jolibois said the town's social ills are not to blame for the shooting. "Unfortunately it had to happen here, but it is a Canadian experience," she said.

That may be true, but it's never a bad time to put a spotlight on systemic suffering, especially when it's of such a magnitude that Blackstock can credibly dub it "our Mississippi ... the same racial discrimination that we saw in the United States against African-Americans." In fact, she added, it's worse.

And I'd agree, in one way: While the U.S. has and continues to obsess over its racism, we are not getting nearly angry enough.

Take Flint, Michigan. Americans have been consumed by the story of the majority-black city's lead-poisoned water. No doubt some Hollywood director already smells Oscar bait. Meanwhile, our own unsafe-drinking-water scandal threatens to become an overlooked independent documentary.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is right to travel to La Loche today, because outrage over the deadliest school shooting in our history and its causes could easily fade to a whimper. As he does, Blackstock will be pushing for an estimated $200,000 yearly investment in on-the-ground change for indigenous kids.

It's an old story, this racism, as old as this country. So is America's, where the outrage burns far hotter.

Anger can't solve problems on its own. But nothing will change without it.

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Your essential daily news

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Your essential daily news
MOVIES BOOKS TELEVISION FOOD

The Kung Fu Panda series of films are well-loved by audiences around the world. Inset: Kung Fu Panda 3 directors Jennifer Yuh Nelson and Alessandro Carloni. CONTRIBUTED

Riding the wave of Po-pularity

IN FOCUS

Directors love their star of Kung Fu Panda

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

It's all about Po, don't you know.

When I ask Kung Fu Panda 2 and 3 director Jennifer Yuh Nelson how she feels about being one of the highest grossing female directors of all time, she demurs and gives all the credit to her star.

"I think it is a testament to how much people like Po and like these films. There is such a huge fan base it is really flattering to have been helming something that huge."

Alessandro Carloni, her directing partner on Kung Fu Panda 3, adds, "I think it will be fair to assume this will be the highest grossing movie ever to be directed by a Korean woman and an Italian man."

For the uninitiated, Po is the clumsy giant panda that became an improbable hero, dumpling-eating champion and kung fu master in the first two movies. Voiced by Jack Black, in the new film he is reunited with his biological father Li Shan (Bryan Cranston) who takes his son back to the Panda Village so the youngster can learn about himself, become a Chi master and do battle with Kai, a supernatural bull villain played by Oscar winner J.K. Simmons.

Both directors have great affection for Po and understand why audiences have fallen in love with the character.

"We love how enthusiastic he is, how geeky he is, how much passion he has," says Alessandro. "One thing I have heard someone say is often there are movies where the side cast steals the show because they are the most fun while the central character is the straight guy. But we made a movie around a goofball and everybody else are the straight characters. He is the one who steals the show. When Po is on screen you will love him."

"He has got so much enthusiasm and is basically wishing for something that is bigger than him," says Yuh. "Something he is not able to achieve and yet he perseveres. That's why we root for him because we've been there. Everyone has been there where there is something you wish you could do but don't have the means to do it and yet you keep on going. You have to root for that."

The pair have been with Po for a long time. Yuh was head of story and the action sequence supervisor on Kung Fu Panda before taking over the reins for the second film. Carloni worked on the first film as animation supervisor and story artist on part two.

Their almost 10-year journey with Po has been shared with Jack Black, who was the model for the character.

"He's very unique in that he's so funny but underneath the funny he's got so much heart," says Yuh of Black.

"He's not somebody you laugh at, you laugh with him. You root for him and that is very rare. Usually you have these more jaded guys that are funny and you laugh at them when they fall on their face. But you feel bad for this guy when he falls on his face. I think that just leaks out of his performance."

MOVIE RATINGS by Richard Crouse

Kung Fu Panda 3	★★★★
The Finest Hours	★★
JeruZalem	★★★

HOW RATING WORKS
★★★★ SEE IT
★★★ WORTHWHILE
★★ UP TO YOU
★ SKIP IT

4 SUNDANCE FILMS ON MASS SHOOTINGS AND FIREARMS

Gun violence was on the minds of more than a few filmmakers this year — the ongoing issue was the main subject of four new films at Sundance. "Those films stood out to us because of the way they were made and the power within them," said Trevor Groth, the festival's director of programming. Here's a look at how the three docs and one movie tackle the subject of guns in America. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

1 Newton

Director Kim Snyder goes deep into the community of Newtown, Conn., in the aftermath of the Sandy Hook Elementary School shootings where 20 children and six educators were murdered.

In her documentary, Snyder explores the lives of those affected by the tragedy — the parents of children who were killed, parents of children who survived, Sandy Hook teachers, local law enforcement, religious leaders, and even a volunteer EMT.

"I didn't really have any big agenda," Snyder said, other than showing the community truthfully.

"But, as (Sandy Hook parent) David Wheeler says, the people who have the most motivation to allow that intrusion of a camera are people who, as he said, feel compelled to say something or do something that might prevent another town or family from having to go through this."

2 Under the Gun

Katie Couric and director Stephanie Soechtig (Fed Up) returned to Sundance with a sweeping overview of guns in America — melding jaw-dropping stats (like how gun stores outnumber Starbucks and McDonald's combined in the U.S.), historical perspective (how the NRA used to stay out of politics), and emotional accounts from the families of the deceased (including mothers in Chicago and the brother of a girl killed in Aurora). They also speak to a variety of pro-gun advocates, from those who support background checks to those who scoff at the idea.

"Even people who've been immersed in this issue for years told us they learned some things from the film," Couric said. "I was surprised how the NRA's tentacles spread so far and wide and how the organization has its fingerprints on so many things."

3 Dark Night

Dark Night is the sole narrative feature in the bunch, and deals with a mass shooting in a Florida suburb. The not-so-oblique title references the Aurora, Colo., massacre of 2012 during a midnight screening of The Dark Knight Rises.

"It starts with the massacre in Aurora," director Tim Sutton said. "There was something that happened to the movie theatre that day. The movie theatre became unsafe. It became corrupted, possibly forever. I felt as a filmmaker a responsibility to try to touch on this theme."

BORNE OUT OF FRUSTRATION
Director AJ Schnack believes the multiple films were borne out of frustration and a feeling of powerlessness.

4 Speaking is Difficult

Speaking is Difficult may never be finished. The short documentary is a living film, meaning every time there is another mass shooting, director AJ Schnack and his team will update it. He'd submitted a rough cut of the film to Sundance months ago and had to update it twice since then as new events occurred.

Schnack's film shows the locations of the shootings, as they exist now, overlaid with 911 calls from the event.

"It's becoming almost a ritual where an event happens, there is a level of outrage for a few days and then as it gets further away it recedes and we go through it again," Schnack said. "The events were starting to become like echoes of previous events."

Schnack found the now-normalcy of the settings quite striking.

"A lot of the locations have returned to being the same place — a restaurant, a salon, a school," he said. "People walk past as if nothing has happened."

GUNS ARE A BIG ISSUE

"Guns, of course, are a big issue," said Sundance founder Robert Redford. "It's not just going to sit there because the deaths keep coming. It's going to keep rising up and rising up and it's going to get heated and I think there will be some resolve of some kind. I think it's time."

OSCARS

Diversity move splits Academy

Since the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences said it was altering membership rules in response to an outcry over the diversity of its voters and nominees, another uproar has erupted around Hollywood. Many academy members are protesting that the new measures unjustly scapegoat older academy members and imply they're racist.

Fiery letters have poured into the academy. Trade magazines are littered with critical op-eds from members. Meanwhile, civil rights leaders and others say the academy's actions didn't go far enough. More steps are needed, they say, to make the Oscars and the industry more inclusive.

Reforms meant to calm a crisis seem to have only further enflamed it. This year's Feb. 28 Academy Awards are looking less like a glitzy gala and more like a battlefield. "We all have to calm down a bit. The conversation has become unduly vitriolic," says Rod Lurie, the writer-director of Straw Dogs and The Contender and a member of the academy's directors' branch. "Nobody in the academy should dignify any accusations of racism," Lurie said, "but there obviously are biases that are created by the demographics of the academy."

The typically slow-moving academy acted swiftly last week, holding an emergency meeting of its Board of Governors. In the wake of a second straight year of all-white acting nominees — and calls for a boycott of the Oscars broadcast — the 51-member board unanimously voted to revamp membership rules in an effort to change the makeup of the largely white, male and older association of some 7,000 exclusive members.

Though Oscar voting was previously for life, it will now be restricted to members who have been active in the industry within the past 10 years, with a few exceptions like for previous Oscar nominees. The academy also set a goal to double minority and female members by 2020.

Some academy members, while applauding efforts to diversify the academy, said taking away voting rights from older members smacks of ageism, and that they aren't to blame for the dearth of minority nominees in the past two years; the industry is. Studies have proven that minorities remain under-represented in all levels of the movie business, from protagonists on screen to executives who can green-light a film. But the last two years are something of an aberration in recent Oscar history. In the 10 years prior, 24 of the 200 acting nominees were black. (Far lower is the rate of nods for Hispanics or Asian-Americans, however.)

William Goldstein, a composer and longtime academy member, chastised the academy in a Los Angeles Times editorial for "capitulating to political correctness" while missing the bigger picture. He believes outreach will make a difference, not manipulating demographics.

"The set of voters that they're going to get rid of have seen more movies and have more context in which to judge something than any newbie coming into the academy," Goldstein said. "You can bring in more women, you can bring in more anybody. Everybody's a human being. They're going to vote what they're going to vote. Nothing's going to change."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PRESENTING

Jacob Tremblay, boy from Room, to charm crowd
Vancouver's Jacob Tremblay will present at next month's Academy Awards. The nine-year-old actor has been a Hollywood fixture lately with raves for his gripping performance in Room and his charming speech at the Critics' Choice Awards.
THE CANADIAN PRESS

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THE TV DINNER JESSICA ALLEN

Director Mike Nichols' sharp wit and protean knowledge made him someone you'd want around your dinner table

Sometimes I imagine that there's an episode of Sex and the City I've never seen and one day I accidentally stumble upon it and oh, sweet joy!

This will never happen. But there are plenty of Mike Nichols films I've yet to experience, which I discovered after a sneak-peek viewing of an upcoming PBS American Masters episode dedicated to the director that premieres Friday.

"After this is over I think we should watch The Fortune," I suggested to Simon while we watched from the couch. "I've never seen it."

"I have," he said, "but I couldn't finish it — and you know how I feel about Warren Beatty."

"Remind me?"

"He's a comic genius. He can do no wrong," he said. "Except here."

"How about Carnal Knowledge then?"

"With Jack Nicholson? Always."

"Do you think Mike Nichols is considered an 'auteur'?" I asked.

"We do. I mean, you've written two columns on his movies [Primary Colors and The Birdcage] in less than a year," Simon said. "But I don't think everyone does. Maybe because we expect a recognizable visual language from auteurs but all of Nichols' works are so unique. The consistency in his films is that there's always a specific intelligence at work, which you come to appreciate when hearing him talk."

Which, once we stopped talking, the documentary allowed. There was plenty on his early life: how Nichols had few friends until he enrolled at the University of Chicago (he met Susan Sontag standing in line, not to mention Elaine May, who directed the American Masters episode); how he dropped out to study with Lee Strasberg; and how he and May became improv sensations with their satirical routines that audiences, including critics, adored.

THE SHOW: American Masters: Mike Nichols

THE MEAL: Smoked oysters and saltine crackers

Then came stage directing, which earned Nichols two Tony Awards by the age of 34. Film followed. His first two, Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf ('67) and The Graduate ('68), earned him best director Academy Award nominations. (The latter is the only film for which he won.)

From all accounts, Nichols' sharp wit and protean knowledge made him someone you'd want around your dinner table, which reminded both me and Simon of my dad. Plus, they both get weepy when talking about Meryl Streep.

And they both love to eat: "Until he had his heart surgery and it changed his appetite, he was such a gourmet and gourmand," Candice Bergen told Vanity Fair in an incredible oral history published last September. "He just loved food and would drive miles and miles for obscure fried-oyster places on [Martha's] Vineyard, and then would drive from there to the best pizza place, and then would go home for lunch."

Coincidentally, we snacked on canned smoked oysters and saltine crackers while we watched May's American Masters tribute to her friend. They're less bon vivant and more proletarian, to be certain — but former Gourmet editor-in-chief Ruth Reichl, who I interviewed about a year after Nichols passed away in 2014 at the age of 83, told me the director "was one of the happiest eaters I ever met."

I think he would've approved.

Jessica Allen is the digital correspondent on CTV's The Social.

MOVIES BRIEF

Dominic West to play seductive cad onstage

Dominic West would like to be the next James Bond. But he's worried you think of him as a cad.

The British star of The Affair and The Wire nurtures a dream of playing 007, but in the meantime he's relishing the chance to be a smooth-talking sexual schemer onstage in Les Liaisons Dangereuses. West concedes with a laugh that Valmont is an "evil b—d"

But while he says he's "longing to play a nice hero," he knows the devil gets all the good lines.

The production at London's Donmar Warehouse was broadcast live in British and U.S. movie theatres Thursday, with repeat screenings around the world over the coming weeks.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dominic West. GETTY IMAGES

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CONTROVERSY

Fiennes to play Jackson in TV comedy

Joseph Fiennes to play the late king of pop. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Joseph Fiennes will star as Michael Jackson in a one-off TV comedy set to broadcast later this year — a casting decision that has added fuel to a raging debate about opportunities for non-white actors in movies and TV.

The white British star of Shakespeare in Love plays the black King of Pop in Elizabeth, Michael & Marlon, alongside Stockard Channing as Elizabeth Taylor and Brian Cox as Marlon Brando.

The script is based on a — possibly fictitious — road trip the three stars are rumoured to have made in an attempt to leave New York after the Sept. 11 attacks.

Sky Arts, which commissioned the drama, said Wednesday that the show is in post-production. The channel said it was "part of a series of comedies about unlikely stories from arts and cultural history."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Marlon Wayans stars as a Christian Grey-like character in the spoof Fifty Shades of Black. HANDOUT

Wayans' world

INTERVIEW

King of spoofs returns as lead in new comedy he co-wrote

Matt Prigge
Metro | New York

Marlon Wayans jokes about the reason he's always working. "My little one — this little spoiled brat — I take him to Nashville. I ask him where he wants to eat. He says, 'Let's go to Mastro's'," he tells us, referring to the high-end eatery. "If he ever complains, 'Dad, why were you always on the road?' 'Because I had to f—ing pay for Mastro's, you little b—d!'"

Right now, the actor and performer, 43, has Fifty Shades of Black, a send-up of Fifty Shades of Grey. Wayans co-wrote and plays the mysterious Christian Grey analog in the comedy.

I have to confess I don't hate the movie Fifty Shades of Grey.
I don't hate it. I love-hate it. I think you have to love-hate the movie in order to make fun of it. You have to love and respect what's good about it, and you have to hate what's bad about it. You have to find out what's funny about it, and then deliver it. So I didn't hate it. It looked great. I thought some of the flirting was cute. I didn't like the sex scenes. They were pretty boring.

They're very PG-13.
They're PG. It's like a G. I could see Kung Fu Panda doing some of the stuff in that movie. I can see Fiona and Shrek doing something like that. (Laughs) "Come to the red room. I'll get the big whip. I'll use my tail!" Fifty Shades of Green.

How many times did you have to watch the film?
150 times.

I imagine that's like Stockholm Syndrome: eventually you come to love it all.
It becomes your favorite movie. You watch it over and over and over again, until you throw up in your mouth, slightly. When someone mentions the movie you go (gags).

Do you think you're even simply making fun of it?
It's not making fun of it. It's a comedic re-telling. Honestly if you've never seen Fifty Shades of Grey you would still enjoy this movie, because of the characters and the situations. You make these movies like they're original, and you have to make the journey enjoyable whether people have seen them or not. You're doing a comedy. At the end of the day we approached it like a comedy. Not a spoof; a comedy.

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DRAMA

The Finest Hours

Director: Craig Gillespie
Starring: Chris Pine, Ben Foster

Casey Sherman and Michael J. Tougias' book detailing a daring 1952 Coast Guard rescue off the New England seaboard comes to the screen in this Disney film produced by Jim Whitaker. Paul Tamasy, Scott Silver and Eric Johnson team to pen the screenplay.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 53% Audience: 95%

DRAMA

45 Years

Director: Andrew Haigh
Starring: Charlotte Rampling, Tom Courtenay

There is just one week until Kate Mercer's 45th wedding anniversary and the planning for the party is going well. But then a letter arrives for her husband. The body of his first love has been discovered, frozen and preserved in the icy glaciers of the Swiss Alps.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 98% Audience: 78%

COMEDY

50 Shades of Black

Director: Michael Tiddes
Starring: Marlon Wayans

This spoof from the Wayans Brothers parodies the ultra-popular novel/film series Fifty Shades of Grey.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: NOT YET REVIEWED Audience: 75%

ANIMATION

Kung Fu Panda 3

Director: Alessandro Carloni, Jennifer Yuh Nelson
Starring: Jack Black

When Po's long-lost panda father suddenly reappears, the reunited duo travels to a secret panda paradise to meet scores of hilarious new panda characters. But when the supernatural villain Kai begins to sweep across China defeating all the kung fu masters, Po must do the impossible.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 89% Audience: 97%

COMEDY

Dirty Grandpa

Director: Dan Mazer
Starring: Robert DeNiro, Zac Efron

A recently widowed veteran tricks his adult grandson into going on a road trip for Spring Break in Florida.

ROTTEN TOMATOES™ SCORE

Critics: 6% Audience: 53%

MYSTERY/HORROR

The Boy

Director: William Brent Bell
Starring: Lauren Cohan, Rupert Evans

Greta is a young American woman who takes a job as a nanny in a remote English village, only to discover that the family's 8-year-old is a life-sized doll that the parents care for just like a real boy, as a way to cope with the death of their actual son 20 years prior.

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Love, murder, intrigue make good TV

INTERVIEW

British writer uses plot twists and slow reveals in London Spy

Ned Ehrbar
Metro | Hollywood

Ben Whishaw plays a young Londoner trying to solve the mystery of his lover's murder. HANDOUT

British writer Tom Rob Smith makes his first foray into writing for television with the twisting, mysterious London Spy, about a young Londoner named Danny (Ben Whishaw), who meets Alex, a reserved math genius. The two become lovers, then Alex disappears and Danny discovers he was a spy — and Danny is being framed for his murder. Danny's ensuing hunt for the truth leads to British intelligence giant MI6.

So what's the secret to crafting a good mystery? A good love story, according to Smith.

Your first work, Child 44, was a novel adapted into a movie. How did making a TV series change your approach?
With the novel it was just a case of you believe in it, you go away and you write it and then you find a world for it. And this was kind of similar. I didn't have any TV experience, I hadn't written an original drama before, but I knew that I wanted to tell the story and I knew it was TV. I knew it wasn't film, and I also knew it wasn't a book. It's like first-person narrative through the eyes of the main character, played by Ben Whishaw, but he didn't go to university. He left school at 16, he's an ordinary guy working a kind of dead-end job. He was never going to write it down, he was never going to have a voice that would work on the page. I couldn't imagine what that would be. He's a visual character. He's someone who will listen and will react to a situation. So I knew it was going to be TV. And then it was just a question of buckling down, believing in it and writing it.

What were your ways into tackling the process of writing for TV?
With the first episode, there was a lot of debate about pace. One of the things I love about TV is you have more time. The conventional story — your partner is murdered and you take on the question of who murdered them — has been told countless times. With this, we have enough time to work out what their love story is as a particular love story without it being a shorthand. Let's spend a bit of time with these two people. Love stories aren't all the same — we fall in love for completely different reasons. I wanted to understand that these two people were both lost for very different reasons. You have someone who's very hedonistic and then you have someone who's deeply closeted, locked into a world of people who are dark and dangerous. In London, those two worlds stare at each other. On one side of the road in Vauxhall you have these clubs that finish at 8 a.m. And then you have someone in that world staring at the opposite side — MI6. And so you have these two people collide, and I wanted us as an audience to really connect with them.

> **I wanted us as an audience to really connect with them before we ripped them apart.**
> Tom Rob Smith, writer

What about getting into the MI6, mystery part of something like this?
There were two central mysteries at the heart of it, which is No. 1, what happened. Was he murdered or was he actually involved in these sexual practices and did he go wrong? That's the first question, and the second one was who was he? Often in these stories, the lover is kind of a fixed point, unchanging throughout the whole thing. But I wanted that character to change across the series, for in this investigation that Ben goes on, he would get closer to the person through all the different elements of who they are.

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THE FINEST HOURS

Chris Pine may be the leading man, but it's his dad he admires

Looking at Chris Pine's career, it's hard to imagine that he hadn't always harboured a lifelong passion to be an actor.

In a little over a decade since his first big screen role (the sequel to The Princess Diaries), Pine, 35, has established himself as one of the most recognizable stars of his generation. He's got his third Star Trek movie coming this summer, followed by Wonder Woman in 2017. His latest, The Finest Hours, is out Friday.

Stardom of this kind doesn't come accidentally to anyone, but to talk to Pine is to realize that he truly thinks of it as a lark.

"I don't even feel like I picked it," Pine said in a recent interview. "I just started doing plays in college. And then I went to L.A. Then I got an agent. It just sort of rolled like a very slow snowball into what I'm doing now. It's very weird."

Pine did come from acting stock, however. His father, Robert Pine, is a journeyman working actor best known for CHiPs (Sgt. Getraer). His mother, Gwynne Gilford, was also an actress, as was his grandmother, Anne Gwynne. Growing up in Los Angeles meant he was even closer to the business. He did production assistant work on Ryan Murphy's show, Popular, and then on a Roger Corman television show that his father was working on. "Just regular old nepotism," Pine said, laughing.

That's not to say he's not deeply serious about his profession, accidental or not.

In The Finest Hours, Pine plays a real life hero who led an impossible Coast Guard mission in 1952 to rescue three dozen men stranded on a wrecked oil tanker that a terrible storm had torn in half. And it's a bit of a departure for Pine.

Sure, it's a nail-biting adventure, but Pine's character, the late Bernie Webber, doesn't exactly have the confidence of, say, Captain Kirk or some of the other cocksure extroverts he's played in the past.

"Bernie struck me as someone who experienced great insecurity, anxiety, about his own ability and asked himself many times: am I good enough?" Pine said. "If you're human and alive, I think we've all felt that intensely at one point or another."

To prepare, he listened to audio recordings of Webber to nail his thick New England accent. He studied his memoir and went out with the Coast Guard in Los Angeles to try to get a sense of their lives.

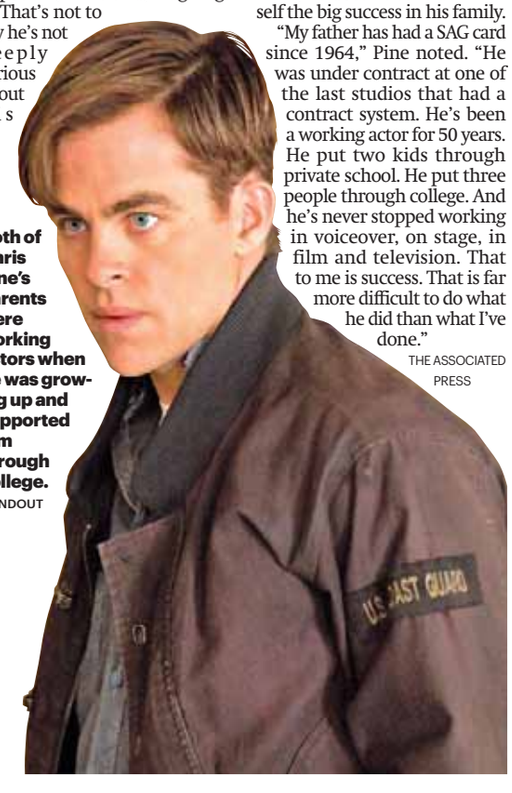
On set, too, director Craig Gillespie said Pine helped set the tone for the difficult shoot by being on time, prepared, and ready to bear anything — even being cold, wet and miserable for three months — with a sense of humour.

"He can be such a chameleon. He has great comedic timing, and then he can be this leading hero with swagger and then he can do character stuff. Because he's so handsome, sometimes that gets lost in the shuffle. But it really is amazing to see the nuances that he brings to his characters," said Gillespie.

While he might have more fame, he doesn't consider himself the big success in his family.

"My father has had a SAG card since 1964," Pine noted. "He was under contract at one of the last studios that had a contract system. He's been a working actor for 50 years. He put two kids through private school. He put three people through college. And he's never stopped working in voiceover, on stage, in film and television. That to me is success. That is far more difficult to do what he did than what I've done."

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS



Both of Chris Pine's parents were working actors when he was growing up and supported him through college.
HANDOUT

Holliday Grainger's finest accent yet

THE FINEST HOURS

Manchester actor adopts Massachusetts brogue in film

Richard Crouse
For Metro Canada

Those only familiar with Holliday Grainger from her high profile appearance as the 1930s gangster Bonnie Parker in the much-hyped A&E miniseries Bonnie & Clyde could be forgiven for thinking she was born and raised on American soil. A perfect Texas drawl disguised her natural English accent.

"I'm from Manchester," she said in our recent sit down, "northwest England."

"Home of the Stone Roses," I replied, mentioning the Mancunian hit makers of Love Spreads.

"I'm a bit too young for that but it's a small town so the Stone Roses are never too far away," she replied with a wicked laugh.

This weekend the 27-year-old brings a new accent to the maritime drama The Finest Hours. She plays Massachusetts native Miriam, a bride-to-be anxiously awaiting the return of her Coast Guard fiancé (Chris Pine) from a life or death mission during a brutal New England nor'easter.

"I think I'm quite good at adopting accents," she says. "Once I started the Bonnie and Clyde Texas accent it was very easy. Within a day I was speaking in the accent all the time and I found it quite comfortable."

She was so secure with the twang she'd often keep the accent going even when not on camera. The Finest Hours presented more of a challenge.

"I found this much harder. I actually stayed in my own accent on set for the first week or two because I didn't feel comfortable enough in the accent to stay in it."

To master the 1950s coastal Massachusetts brogue she worked with a dialect coach and tried, unsuccessfully, to get some real life input.

"I went to Chatham (Massachusetts) and spent an afternoon trying to record people but Chatham is now so affluent and touristy. I was going into bars and restaurants and talking to people. 'Where are you from? Oh, you're from New York. You've just moved here. Which pubs have young girls working in them who are from around here?' I'd go and record some of them and they'd sound like they were from bloody Manhattan. Like bloody Valley Girls or something. It was not like the 1950s accent I needed to hear."

Her character's real life daughter Patty ended up helping out, introducing Grainger to a contemporary of Miriam's who "had the right way of talking. The resonance."

The actress nailed the New England burr and then refined it during production.

"In the middle of shooting the producers would say, 'It's too strong, bring it back.' In my mind (I was thinking) has she been at work where she speaks quite well or is she angry? It's fluid. People change their accents all the time."

Ironically, after all that work it's likely Miriam didn't have the usual regional accent.

"In actual fact Miriam's first language wasn't even English," says Grainger "She was brought up speaking Finnish so she didn't actually have the traditional accent but for the purposes of our movie we're not going to play around with that. It's too complicated."

As for Grainger, who will next be seen starring opposite Alicia Vikander and Judi Dench in Tulip Fever, don't expect to hear her Mancunian lilt every time she opens her mouth.

"I change my accent all the time depending on whom I'm talking too," she says. "If anyone had to characterize me they'd be bloody lost."

SPEAKING OF WHICH

It's likely Miriam didn't even have the usual regional accent. "She was brought up speaking Finnish," says Grainger. "So she didn't actually have the traditional accent but for the purposes of our movie we're not going to play around with that. It's too complicated."

Holliday Grainger, right, plays Miriam in Disney's The Finest Hours, a heroic action-thriller based on the extraordinary true story of the most daring rescue in the history of the Coast Guard. HANDOUT

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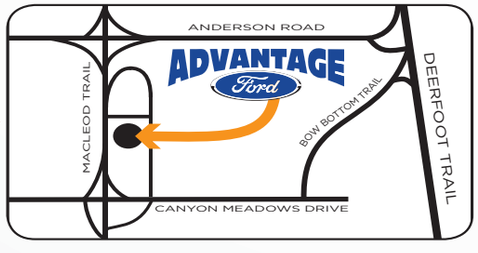

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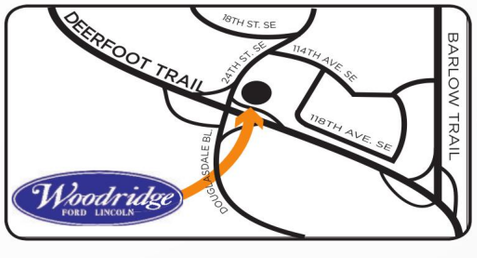

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WOOD AUTOMOTIVE GROUP

Valentine's Day may be meant for couples, but these brownies are meant for sharing. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Add a spicy kick to your classic brownie

BAKING

Turn up the heat using cayenne and chili powder

Mexican hot chocolate is a beloved beverage made from chocolate (no surprise there) combined with cinnamon and another spice or two to bring up the heat. The combination of spicy and chocolate just plain works, and we wanted to see how it would translate into another beloved treat, the good old American brownie. Again, it just plain worked.

Buy pure ancho chili powder for this recipe, which is made from the ancho pepper. It has a mild, slightly smoky and somewhat fruity flavour. Don't be tempted to substitute regular chili powder or chili spice blend. These spice mixes have additional spices in them they may work wonderfully in a beefy chili, but won't bring anything to the party here.

RECIPE MEXICAN CHOCOLATE CHIP BROWNIES

Start to finish: 45 minutes
Servings: 24

Ingredients

- 3 cups (18 ounces) semisweet chocolate chips, divided
- 3/4 cup (1 1/2 sticks) unsalted butter
- 1 3/4 cups sugar
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- 4 large eggs
- 1 1/2 cups all-purpose flour
- 1/3 cup cocoa powder
- 1 tsp baking powder
- 1 tsp kosher salt
- 1/4 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp cayenne pepper
- 1/4 tsp ancho chili powder

Directions

1. Heat the oven to 350 F. Coat a 9-by-13-inch metal baking pan with cooking spray.
2. In a medium saucepan over medium-low, melt 2 cups of the chocolate chips with the butter, stirring frequently. As soon as the mixture is smooth remove it from the heat. Stir in the sugar and vanilla, then beat in the eggs one at a time.
3. While the chocolate is melting, in a medium bowl mix together the flour, cocoa powder, baking powder, salt, cinnamon, cayenne and ancho chili powder.
4. After beating the eggs into the chocolate mixture, stir in the flour mixture until well blended. Stir in the remaining chocolate chips. Pour the batter into the prepared pan and smooth the top. Bake for about 30 minutes, or until a wooden toothpick or skewer inserted at the centre comes out clean. Cool completely in the pan on a wire rack. Cut into 24 squares.

Nutrition information per serving: 230 calories; 120 calories from fat (52 per cent of total calories); 13 g fat (8 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 50 mg cholesterol; 115 mg sodium; 31 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 22 g sugar; 3 g protein. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

LIQUID ASSETS

Vermouth over ice

A wine guy is always on call, so I wasn't surprised when I got a text from a friend asking my thoughts on a bottle she found in the deepest, darkest corner of her refrigerator.

It was Martini & Rossi Extra Dry Vermouth (1,000 ml, $11.29-$13.29); a white and flavourful fortified wine best known for playing a supporting role in popular old-school mixed drinks like the martini and Manhattan.

Turns out a martini-fueled James Bond marathon forced her to invest in a litre bottle. Since the cocktail only needs a splash of vermouth she's been sitting on the remainder for over a month.

She played her Casino Royale cards right by refrigerating the bad boy. Even its red version will start to deteriorate quickly once opened. The cold enclosure of the fridge significantly slows down its aging process.

My recommendation was to drink it over ice with a citrus garnish and then get mussels and steam them using the vermouth. Life doesn't get much better than that.

PETER ROCKWELL/FOR METRO

ROSE REISMAN THE SAVVY EATER

THIS WEEK: Dips

Pairing a tasty dip with veggies to get more of the good stuff in your diet? You may be serving up more than you bargained for!

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Summer Fresh Roasted Garlic Hummus

Portion 1/4 cup
Calories 120
Fat 7 g

SKIP THIS

Summer Fresh Spinach Dip

Portion 1/4 cup
Calories 260
Fat 26 g

HERE'S WHY

Equivalent: Two regular Arby's Roast Beef sandwiches in fat

Veggies and whole wheat pita wedges are healthy snacks, but seem like Plain Janes on their own, making them a frequent partner with dips, spinach being a popular pick. But where's the spinach? It's speckled throughout the mayonnaise, which is a main ingredient. This translates into excess calories and fat. Hummus, made primarily from chickpeas, tahini paste and olive oil, is a much healthier option. Think of this small serving of spinach dip as the same as eating 2 Arby's roast beef sandwiches in fat — that's far from a healthy snack!

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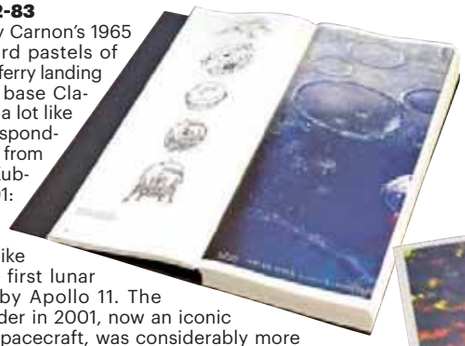
The vision of Kubrick

Taschen's The Making of Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey reveals the breadth of Kubrick's artful obsession, announcing its epic intentions even before you read a single word of it. The pages fold out to reveal the full breadth of Kubrick's artful obsession. It's a book of beauty about a film of wonder and fear. TORSTAR NEWS SERVICE

Aries over Clavius: Moon base

Pages 82-83

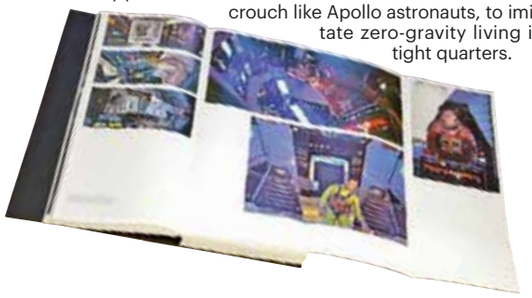


Artist Roy Carnon's 1965 storyboard pastels of the Aries ferry landing at moon base Clavius look a lot like the corresponding scene from Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey and also like the 1969 first lunar landing by Apollo 11. The Aries lander in 2001, now an iconic cinema spacecraft, was considerably more curved than the spindly Eagle which actually touched down on the moon.

Concept artworks of Discovery's main control area

Pages 104-105

Concept art of life inside the Jupiter-bound spacecraft Discovery shows how visionary Kubrick and his team were in designing 2001. The computers and other space gear look as futuristic today as they did upon the film's release in 1968, but also entirely practical. Kubrick ordered the actors to bend and crouch like Apollo astronauts, to imitate zero-gravity living in tight quarters.



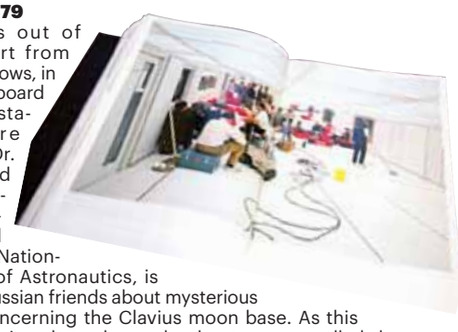
Test photo of man-ape trio silhouetted

Page 352-353

Long before the dawn of computer-generated images in movies, Kubrick was exploring the use of multiple projectors to achieve the artificial reality of composite photo effects. For 2001, he pioneered a front-projection system used for the Dawn of Man sequence, setting ape-like creatures — actually actors in ape suits — against exotic location footage on a background projection plane, like this test photo in the yellow light of dusk.

Shooting, with the crew, in sterile futuristic interiors

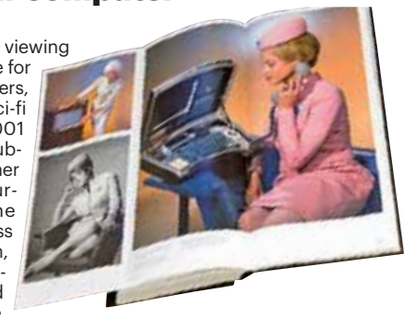
Page 378-379



Nothing is out of place, apart from raised eyebrows, in the scene aboard the space station where tip-lipped Dr. Heywood Floyd (William Sylvester), head of the U.S. National Council of Astronautics, is grilled by Russian friends about mysterious rumours concerning the Clavius moon base. As this 1966 production photo shows, the shoot was controlled chaos, with Kubrick in the thick of it, seated top centre in a blue suit.

Heather in costume and with Honeywell 'computer'

Page 478-479



Back-of-seat film viewing is commonplace for today's air travellers, but the stuff of sci-fi in 1968 when 2001 premiered. But Kubrick and his designer once again accurately foresaw the future, with actress Heather Downham, playing a flight attendant aboard the space shuttle Orion, demonstrating how the screen worked. Another actress shows how much the concept of "portable" computers has changed since '68 — you'd need a very large lap to handle this briefcase computer designed for the film by Honeywell.

metro TRAVEL

Your essential daily news

Aloft hotels lets guests order room service through emojis

San Antonio's culinary Pearl

KATE HOBSON/FOR METRO

Gastronomical delights abound in San Antonio, like fresh croissants from Bakery Lorraine; toasted cauliflower with romesco from Supper; and fried snapper throats from Southerleigh.

HEADING SOUTH

Eat your way through this district jewel

Kate Hobson
For Metro Canada

Pearl District is a gem in the otherwise sprawling city of San Antonio, Texas, providing a cosy pocket where history, luxury and inviting fare come together. The once industrial area home to the Pearl Brewery has been restored and redeveloped into a thriving culinary hub now home to many chef-driven restaurants and the Culinary Institute of America. Situated along the northern reach of the San Antonio River, the transformed Pearl District entices both locals and visitors to the area.

Hotel Emma

A warm wood burning outdoor fireplace and friendly staff draw you in and welcome you on arrival at this beautifully restored space that is now Hotel Emma. The design centres around the philosophy of repurposing industrial space into an atmosphere that makes you feel at home while also paying tribute to the history of the location: The Pearl Brewery. This boutique hotel offers some intriguing amenities including a library, rooftop pool, a culinary concierge and an in-room "icebox" filled with farmers market treats and local libations.

Supper

Inspired by the idea of "supper," the unfussy menu is perfect for a gathering of friends for a light, informal evening meal. Vegetables and meat alike are smoked on the hickory grill for added depth of flavour. The salt and vinegar Brussels sprouts are caramelized and tender. The grilled beef 'Santa Maria' with fresh tomato parsley and garlic chimichurri is bright and flavourful. The perfect finish is the ricotta seada with a hint of fennel, pickled blackberries and sprinkled with refreshing bits of celery.

ON THE WEB
For more, information, head to visitsanantonio.com

Southerleigh

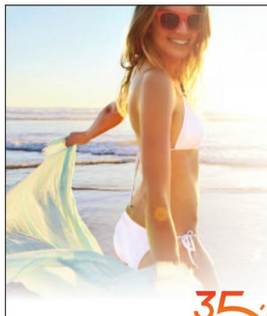
Southerleigh's menu is rich with fresh seafood. The fried snapper throats are a visually impressive dish stacked high on their colourful tray and these incredibly meaty and tender fish throats don't disappoint taste-wise. Their take on devilled eggs, topped with a hunk of bacon and onion marmalade, is sweet, savoury and addictive. Fourteen rotating small-batch craft beers are offered on tap — something to quench everybody's tastes.

Bakery Lorraine

Bright, airy and bustling with people, Bakery Lorraine is a popular brunch and breakfast spot. Sit and enjoy one of their breakfast sandwiches like the croque madame layered with ham, gruyere and a poached egg on grilled sourdough or take some delicious pastries and coffee to go. If you want to experience some nostalgia, try their housemade strawberry poptarts topped with macaroon crumbles.

Nao

Explore the cuisine and culture of Latin America at Nao Gastro Bar and enjoy signature dishes from a dozen different countries. At lunchtime you will experience unique twists on classic dishes that are the creations of the students of the Culinary Institute of America. In the evening professional staff take over and more Latin American cuisine ensues. The menu is frequently updated to reflect seasonally available items so you are sure to have something new, fresh, and exciting.



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TRAVEL HACKER GUIDE

Kayak dubs Barcelona most 'viral' 2016 locale

According to a new guide, Barcelona is predicted to become the most viral (meaning trendy) destination in 2016, while there's no better time to score an airfare deal to Hong Kong.

Those are among some of the travel tips offered on Kayak's new 2016 Travel Hacker Guide, created to inspire consumers and help them plan and book their holidays this year.

Top 10 lists were compiled after converting data from the more than one billion annual travel searches on the Kayak search engine.

In the category of trending destinations, analysts saw a 27 per cent spike in flight searches for Barcelona in 2015, compared to the previous year.

Travellers who have always wanted to go to Hong Kong, meanwhile, will want to take advantage of reduced airfares, as flights from North America dropped 26 per cent last year compared to 2014. With tumbling oil prices, the trend is predicted to continue in 2016. AFP

Barcelona is predicted to become the most viral destination of 2016, followed by Madrid. ISTOCK

TRENDING FOR 2016

Kayak's top 10 viral destinations:

1. Barcelona
2. Madrid
3. Kona, Hawaii
4. Tokyo
5. Bangkok
6. Amsterdam
7. Milan
8. Dublin
9. Manila
10. Athens

TRAVEL NOTES TRANSFORMERS, TRAINS AND TRADITION

Transformers theme park set to open in China in 2017

U.S.-China based film studio DMG Entertainment and toy manufacturer Hasbro have signed a deal to create Transformers Live, according to the Hollywood Reporter. This will be an enormous theme park with live shows and is expected to open in China in 2017 at an undisclosed location. DMG and Hasbro will reportedly build a 4,500 capacity arena for the shows featuring the iconic robots. AFP

Optimus Prime in Hong Kong. PHILIPPE LOPEZ/AFP

Venice kicks off parade of carnival season events

Falling February 9 in 2016, Shrove Tuesday — otherwise known as Mardi Gras — sees carnival fever takes its hold. Venice puts normal life on hold for its annual carnival, as it has for almost 1,000 years. The Venice carnival is famous for its masks, traditionally worn to remove any notion of social class during the celebrations. The theme for the 2016 edition is Creatum introducing Arts and Traditions. AFP

The Venice carnival runs to February 9. AFP

Mumbai travellers log on as Google starts train station Wi-Fi

Google has begun offering free Wi-Fi to Mumbai train passengers in hopes of boosting its role in the Indian market. Free Wi-Fi is rare across India. With more than 23 million people riding Indian railways every day, Google said free Internet will give high-speed access that many can't afford. It also hopes to diversify India's user base. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Google brings Wi-Fi to trains. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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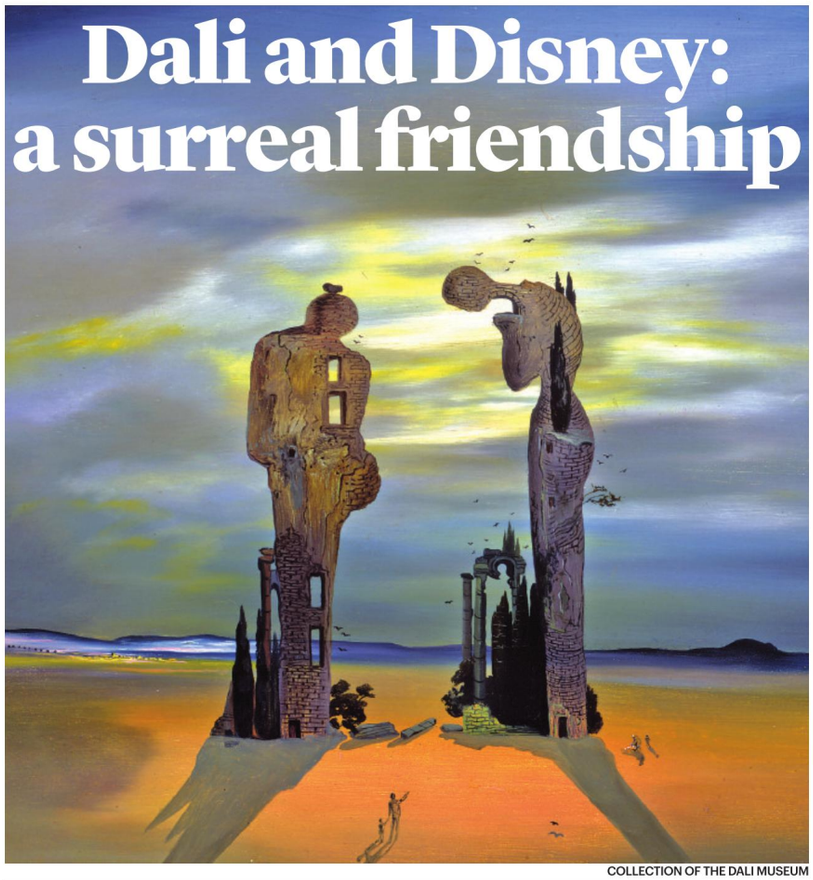
Dali and Disney: a surreal friendship



COLLECTION OF THE DALI MUSEUM

ST PETERSBURG, FLA.

New exhibit shows collab between artist and animator

Visitors to a new exhibition at The Dali Museum in St. Petersburg, Fla., won't just be looking at art. Thanks to virtual reality, they'll be exploring a Dali painting in a dreamy, three-dimensional world that turns art appreciation into an unforgettable, immersive experience.

The new exhibition, Disney and Dali: Architects of the Imagination, tells the story of the relationship between Salvador Dali, the surrealist artist, and Walt Disney, the great American animator and theme-park pioneer. But the museum exhibition's highlight comes after visitors have seen the Disney-Dali show's paintings, story sketches, correspondence, photos and other artifacts. As visitors leave the exhibition area, they'll be invited to don a headset to try the virtual reality experience.

Called Dreams of Dali, the VR experience takes viewers inside Dali's 1935 painting Archeological Reminiscence of Millet's Angelus. The painting depicts two towering stone figures along with tiny human figures in a bare landscape with a moody sky. Users can move around inside the painting, using Oculus Rift headsets to navigate a trippy three-dimensional environment that includes motifs from other Dali works like elephants, birds, ants and his Lobster Telephone sculpture. Accompanied by a haunting piano soundtrack punctuated by bird cries, the VR visuals also include a crescent moon, a stone tunnel and even an image of rocker Alice Cooper, whom Dali featured in a hologram he created in 1973.

Disney and Dali met in the 1940s in Hollywood, according to museum director Hank Hine. "Their sensibilities were very connected," Hine said. "They wanted to take art off the palette, out of the canvas and into the world."

Salvador Dali and Walt Disney in Spain in 1957. A new exhibition at The Dali Museum is dedicated to the relationship between the two men. DALI MUSEUM/WALT DISNEY FAMILY FOUNDATION/DISNEY

The exhibition looks at the castle motif that became a symbol of Disney parks, along with Dali's Dream of Venus pavilion from the 1939 World's Fair, which some consider a precursor of contemporary installation art.

Disney and Dali also collaborated on a short animated movie, Destino, that was eventually completed by Disney Studios. The six-minute movie, which can be found on YouTube, features a dancing girl with long dark hair, a sundial motif and a song with the line, "You came along out of a dream. ... You are my destino." Clips will be played within the gallery for the Disney-Dali exhibition and the full short will be shown at the museum's theatre.

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HEALTH & WELLNESS

Hiking has more benefits than you know

Hiking isn't just a way to experience nature — the activity also has physiological benefits that you might not realize.

You can use hiking to benefit your body in many ways, says Matthew White, associate professor of Biomedical Physiology and Kinesiology at Simon Fraser University.

Lower your risk of diabetes

"Physical exercise like hiking reduces insulin resistance, the stage that precedes type II diabetes," White says.

As people get older and are inactive, they tend to gain weight and become resistant to insulin, a hormone secreted by the pancreas that normally signals your cells to use up the sugar in your bloodstream, says White. The more insulin-resistant your cells become, the less sugar they take up, and the more sugar is left in your blood. Over the long term, this cycle can lead to type II diabetes and associated complications.

Reduce your risk of heart attack and stroke

"Your blood lipids improve with exercises like hiking," says White. "The good cholesterol, HDL (high-density lipoproteins), increases and the relative values of the bad cholesterol, LDL and VLDL (low density and very low density lipoproteins) decrease."

Cholesterol is transported in your blood by molecules called lipoproteins — and some types are better for you than others. HDLs promote a healthy circulatory system, and LDLs and VLDLs can contribute to the build-up of plaque in your arteries, which can narrow your arteries, preventing blood from traveling efficiently in your body, and this increases your risk for cardiovascular disease.

Add to this hiking's ability to help reduce your blood pressure.

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Both the effects of reduced plaque build-up and lowered blood pressure reduce your risk of having a heart attack or stroke.

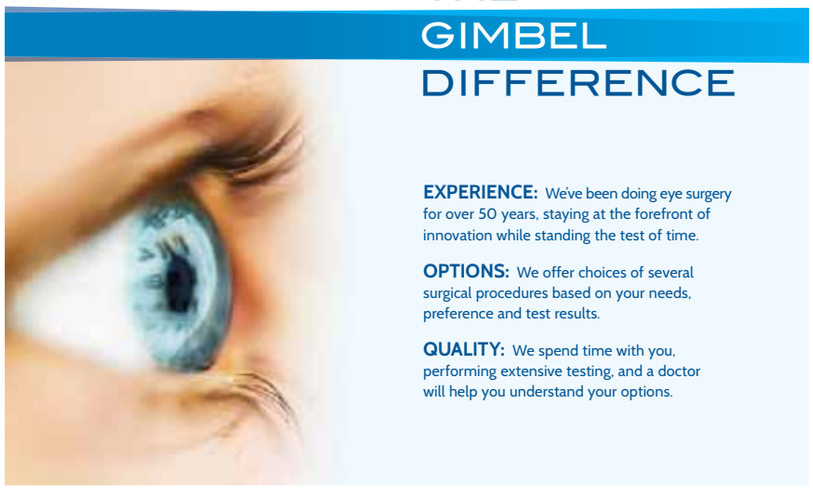
Go easy on your joints

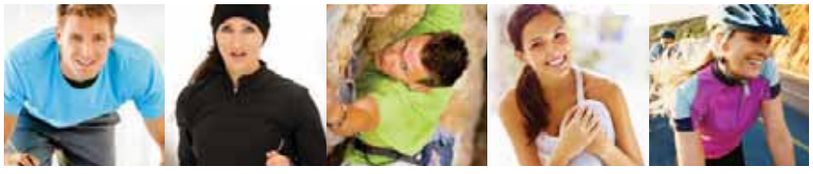
Running on hard surfaces like concrete can be hard on your joints. Hiking trails provide a softer cushion underfoot that protects your joints.

"You get a good cardiovascular benefit with much less stress on your knees," says White.

To access all these benefits, White teaches his students the FITT principle of exercise, which stands for frequency, intensity, type and time. If hiking is your exercise type of choice, White recommends exercising three to five times a week, at an intensity of 60 to 85 per cent of the maximal heart rate predicted for your age — "get a steep enough hill," he says — for about half an hour to an hour per session.

Talk to your doctor if you have preexisting medical conditions.





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Gimbel a leader in innovative procedures

With over 50 years of quality service offering top-notch procedures and consistent innovation, Gimbel Eye Centre continues to lead the pack when it comes to eye care.

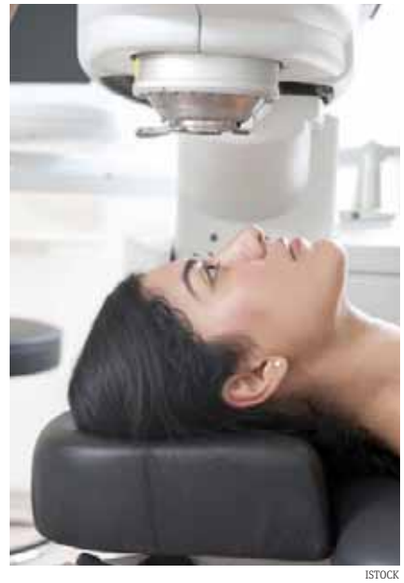
It's a rare accomplishment but the special milestone is the result of outstanding patient care and technological advancement, according to Gimbel's Chief Operating Officer Gregg Becker.

"Our world-class procedures and innovation has propelled us forward as leaders in the provision of safe, high-quality and cost-effective eye surgery," Becker says, adding that his teams have over 500 years' experience combined.

After a thorough assessment process, Gimbel takes the time and tests needed to ensure they provide the best options for each of their patients. The centres use all-laser technologies for refractive surgery, which provides the safest results and great vision at prices that are always competitive.

"Our surgeons began practicing in the areas of cataract and refractive laser surgery when the field was relatively new, and are well known world-wide as innovators in surgical practice, and the procedures they pioneered are now common across the industry," Becker adds.

Gimbel Eye Centre has recently added a new procedure called KAMRA Inlay to help restore near vision.



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"It's used to help patients reduce or eliminate their use of reading glasses. This has been done widely in other parts of Canada and the world, but is relatively new in Western Canada."

For more information, please visit gimbel.com.

Your hair is not in a losing battle

With a new year upon us it's the perfect time to rejuvenate your hair and skin.

Hair loss affects both men and women, especially during the cold and dry winter season. But there are treatments that can help alleviate or rectify hair loss, including new cutting edge men's hair replacement options.

There are several beneficial treatments available to battle hair loss, according to Hair Restoration Services (HRS) owner Arlene Forster, who says hair replacement is one of the best options.

"Hair replacement is a non-surgical and natural looking way to have a full head of hair within hours," she says. "We help people look and feel their best so that they can restore, repair and rejuvenate themselves."

While 80 per cent of HRS clients are men, women actually suffer from hair loss, too, Forster adds.

Forster is currently promoting the latest

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advancements in men's hair replacement, with state-of-the-art hair options including Ultra-Thin cuti one and two, which is affordable and appears completely natural.

"Each hair is placed into the transparent thin skin hair base with a new state of the art injection method, which makes it look like the hair is growing directly from your scalp. One major benefit of this service is you can avoid costly monthly payments by paying as you go."

Ultra -Thin Skin Hair Systems can be cut as needed and is the most flexible hair base when it comes to styling hair. HRS, who also offers skin tightening and hair removal services, has won the Consumer Choice Award for 12 years in a row, including 2016.

NATURAL SKIN HEALER HELPS ECZEMA SUFFERERS

With thousands of Canadians suffering from eczema every year, the market is flooded with remedies. But one in particular is highly effective for many people.

Many eczema sufferers turn to Jian Pai Natural Skin Healer, which is a 100 per cent natural product with a NPN issued by Health Canada, according to Montreal-based distributor Canada Orient International Trade's spokesperson M Chen.

"For example, one girl suffered from serious eczema all over her body since she was very young. Different medications didn't seem to work for her. However, she got better after Jian Pai Natural Skin Care Healer was applied and her skin was fully recovered in 12 days," Chen says.

"Jian Pai cream helps heal or reduce eczema long term and it can be used on the face without risk. This cream is suitable for everyday use and is effective for most skin problems by applying only once."

In order to ensure the efficacy of Jian Pai Natural Skin Healer, it is recommended to take a bath or shower with warm water prior to applying the cream. Removing scab

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and old skin can facilitate the penetration of skin cream. Without taking a bath, the cream may not penetrate well and reduce the efficacy as a result.

Unlike a lot of products on the market that can help skin conditions, Jian Pai Natural Skin Healer doesn't contain hormones that may produce side effects in many users, Chen adds.

PEOPLE-MOVER SHOWS REJUVENATION

While General Motors has generally pinned its high-occupancy hopes on traditional full-size truck-based sport-utility vehicles such as the Tahoe and Yukon, the Buick Enclave as well as the rest of the company's three-rows-of-seats car-based triplets (Acadian and Traverse) have managed to grab buyers who are moving away from the sheer bulk tradition.

The Enclave received a mild refresh for 2013 with everything changed forward of the A-pillar; sharper headlamps were added as well as LED running lights and more prominent fenders. The rear remained familiar, accented by light-emitting-diode (LED) taillights. The vehicle's impressive utility is unchanged thanks to three rows of seats with room for either seven or eight riders, depending on the configuration. The second row slides to provide access to the spacious back row that's actually habitable for adults.

A twist of the key fires a 288-horsepower 3.6-litre V6 that operates through a six-speed automatic transmission. The Enclave begins as a front-wheel-driver, but all-wheel-drive is optional. As befits a Buick, the Enclave is all about luxury as well as practicality. Even base models include enough features to make German-car owners jealous, such as 19-inch aluminum wheels (up from 18-inch) for 2016.

The Enclave's 288-horsepower 3.6-litre V6 is hooked to a six-speed automatic transmission that drives the front wheels; all-wheel-drive is optional. CONTRIBUTED

Safety is covered with seven airbags (including the industry's first center-mounted airbag that protects the driver and front-row passenger from colliding with each other in the event of side impact. Other safety tech includes available camera-based systems that warn of oncoming collisions or if you change lanes without signaling, and blind-spot warning and rear cross-traffic alert. Moving up the trim ladder adds perforated-leather seats (heated in front) with memory, a heated wood steering wheel, chrome-clad 19- or 20-inch wheels and fancier trim.

A wide assortment of features can be ladled on such as navigation, skylight-style sunroof, a 10-speaker touch-screen audio package and a DVD entertainment system. The Enclave can now be had in a special Tuscan Edition that adds a bronze sheen to the waterfall grille, and bronze pockets to the 20-inch chrome wheels.

ENCLAVE

Base Price (including destination):
$51,200

The Regal's strong 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder produces 259 horsepower. CONTRIBUTED

Upscale and fuel-efficient

The Buick Regal is just about the most un-Buick car it sells. Its ride is firm and not pillow soft, and it actually steers right where you point it.

The automobile's clean, yet expressive look is also a far cry from just about any other Buick ever built, and has intricate headlights with LED detailing. The standard 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder was heavily fortified on the inside for 2014 and packs 259 horsepower and 295 pound-feet of torque. The same engine can be found in the high-performance GS model without any major differences.

Turbocharged models are available with all-wheel-drive and a six-speed automatic transmission, while the front-wheel-drive GS is the only Regal that uses a six-speed manual transmission.

REGAL

Base Price (including destination):
$34,000 (2015)

Available as a front-driver only, the "eAssist" packages a 15-kilowatt electric helper motor and small lithium-ion battery that helps improve fuel economy. But both versions produce the same 182 horsepower.

Regals are sold very well equipped, which means plenty of power-operated and luxury-oriented content is part of the standard package. A new Sport Touring trim that includes special 18-inch wheels with black pockets, a rear-view camera, heated leather seats and more.

SMALL CAR PICKS UP POWER

While plenty of people giggled when Buick swore it was really getting the hang of smaller vehicles, few laugh now at the little Encore. Even fewer should find the company's new Sport Touring line humorous, at least until they get behind the wheel.

The practical body gets a winged rear spoiler, uniquely finished 18-inch wheels and body-colour door handles. From its oval-shaped "waterfall" grille to the tip of its two-tone bumper, the Encore features a neat blend of stylish design cues with just a hint of ruggedness. It actually uses the same platform as Buick's Verano sedan and Chevrolet's Cruze and Sonic small cars, however, it's about 17 centimetres longer and 13 centimetres taller than the Sonic hatchback, which gives it far more cargo room with the rear seat in place or folded flat.

The front passenger seat folds flat so that stuff like ladders and building materials can be more easily accommodated. The cabin is also on the receiving end of one of Buick's more fashionable interiors. It has active noise cancellation that uses ceiling-mounted microphones to detect engine sounds, then a special computer dishes out counteracting sound waves through the audio system.

Standard is a 1.4-litre turbocharged four-cylinder engine that generates 138 horsepower and 148 pound-feet of torque, while the Sport Touring uses direct injection and other tweaks to bring those up to 153 horses and 177 pound-feet. Both engines use the same six-speed automatic transmission and available all-wheel-drive system.

Base cars arrive with the usual air/cruise/tilt/power accessories plus 10 airbags and 18-inch wheels. From that point, depending on the designation, you select dual-zone climate control, power sunroof, navigation system, leather-trimmed interior, power-adjustable driver's chair, heated steering wheel, premium Bose sound system, to name just a few. There is also standard OnStar-based 4G LTE mobile Wi-Fi hot spot, which means all your wireless devices have Internet connectivity while on the go.

The updated version of Buick's turbocharged 1.4-litre four-cylinder Encore now delivers 153 horsepower in the Sport Touring. CONTRIBUTED

ENCORE

Base Price (including destination):
$31,000 (2015)

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LUXURY and a lot more

The first-class Escalade combines maximum comfort and performance, along with rugged all-road capability. CONTRIBUTED

For those who enjoy living — and driving — large, Cadillac has the ultimate juggernaut. The Escalade and extended-size Escalade ESV are more like luxury staterooms or penthouses on wheels.

Compared to the regular-length Escalade, the ESV is 50 centimetres longer and has a 36-centimetre wheelbase advantage. That translates into a considerable gain in cargo space with both rear seats folded or with the standard third-row seat in place. Keeping the Escalade duo running strong is a new Chevrolet-Corvette-based 6.2-litre V8 that generates 420 horsepower and 460 pound-feet of torque.

ESCALADE

Base Price (including destination): $84,100

For 2016, it's connected to a new eight-speed automatic transmission. The engine incorporates direct fuel injection and is rather potent, even in a big machine such as the Escalade. Cadillac claims the Escalade can dash to 100 km/h from rest in less than six seconds and that four-wheel-drive fuel "efficiency" is 15.9 l/100 km in the city and 11.1 on the highway. A new four-wheel-drive unit system that's optional in regular-length and ESV Escalades can be left in fully automatic mode, or in manually selected "4 HI" for added traction in mud and snow conditions.

All Escalades come with tri-zone climate control (driver, passenger and a rear zone), heated and cooled front seats and heated second-row seats, power-folding third-row seat, navigation system and a 16-speaker Bose-brand audio package.

New options for 2016 include lane-keep assist and more features in CUE, including capability with Apple CarPlay that puts an Apple interface right there on the touch-screen.

Pairing sporty and sophisticated

While Cadillac's entry-level ATS has earned critical praise for its no-bull approach to performance, it has taken a few years to introduce its first serious performance variant. The ATS-V uses the same twin-turbocharged 3.6-litre V6 found in its larger siblings' V-sport trim, but here it develops 464 horsepower.

Available as either a sedan or coupe, the exterior changes include a vented carbon-fibre hood, more aggressive front and rear fascias, a front-splitter to decrease lift, and wider fenders. The "V" rides on special 18-inch wheels that are wider and wrapped in Michelin rubber.

The regular ATS sedan and coupe haven't been ignored either. The optional 3.6-litre V6 is now an all-new design, despite being the same displacement as before. It now uses direct fuel injection and other tricks to bring horsepower up to around 333, 12 more than the 2015 model. The V6 is still required when adding the optional all-wheel drive.

Base ATS sedans get a 202-horsepower 2.5-litre four-cylinder, while the 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder is standard in the coupe and optional for the sedan. CONTRIBUTED

ATS

Base Price (including destination): $38,100 (sedan), $43,100 (coupe)

The turbo's 272 horsepower is unaltered, but the engine now gains automatic start-stop, which should boost fuel economy slightly. All powerplants are now mated to eight-speed automatic transmissions, but in keeping with its performance nature the turbo engine is still available with a six-speed manual.

The ATS's sporty demeanor can be amplified with an optional suspension package that includes larger Brembo-brand brakes and magnetic ride control that constantly adjusts the suspension characteristics according to road conditions and driver input.

CT6

Base Price (including destination): $80,000

CONTRIBUTED

CADILLAC PUSHES THE ENVELOPE

If there are niches to fill in the luxury-car category, Cadillac appears determined to build product. The CT6 thus becomes the fourth sedan brand in its lineup. And with yet a higher-end model in the planning stages, General Motors' premium division isn't finished by any stretch.

The CT6 is using a combination of luxury appointments, prodigious power, knife-edgy design and, last but not least, lithe and lightweight construction. To this point, Cadillac claims that the CT6 tips the scales below the Mercedes-Benz E-Class and BMW 5-series sedans and weighs about the same as the smaller Cadillac CTS (the CT6 has close to 20 more centimetres grafted in between the front and rear wheels).

Assisting in the pound-paring quest is a 100 per cent aluminum body and front suspension. Preventing the CT6 from becoming corpulent ensures that the three available power teams will provide the driver with plenty of kick. They include a 265-horsepower turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder, a 335-horsepower non-turbo 3.6-litre V6 and a 400-horsepower twin-turbocharged 3.0-litre V6.

All are connected to eight-speed transmissions. All-wheel-drive is available, but only with the 3.6- and 3.0-litre V6s. All-wheel-steering can be had as well.

Naturally, the CT6 comes brimming with content and also provides a significant number of extra-cost luxury and safety amenities. Among the most unique are "Quadzone" climate control, articulating heated and cooled rear seat with message, surround-view security camera that can record a 360-degree view of the car, a rear camera mirror that replaces the traditional mirror and a Bose "Panaray" sound system with 34 strategically positioned speakers.

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CRUISING IN COMFORT

Hard work from GM's bowtie division has resulted in a dramatically different Malibu. CONTRIBUTED

At first blush, the new Malibu is attractively and intelligently designed, unlike the more brick-like 2015 edition. Designers increased the length by six centimetres, while holding the line on width. They also upped the distance between the front and rear wheels by over nine centimetres, of which 3.3 centimetres went to increasing rear legroom.

Inside, the seven- and optional 20-centimetre tablet-style touch-screens controlling the entertainment and cabin functions are remarkable for their size and clarity. Both fit right in with an inviting dashboard that's a far cry from the previous dash.

The revised powertrain lineup starts with a new turbocharged 1.5-litre four-cylinder engine that makes 160 horsepower and 184 pound-feet of torque. It replaces the previous non-turbo 2.5-litre base engine rated at 196 horsepower and 186 pound-feet. Optional is a carryover turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder that's now rated at 250 horsepower and 258 pound-feet (previously 259/295). The base engine's smaller displacement should improve fuel economy, while the slight power reduction likely won't impact performance since the car is about 135 kilograms lighter.

The 1.5 links to a six-speed automatic transmission, while an all-new eight-speed automatic is integral to the 2.0's drivetrain.

In the spring, a hybrid Malibu arrives that uses components from the 2016 Chevrolet Volt's plug-in system. Output is estimated at 182 horsepower and fuel economy is about 4.9 l/100 km on the highway. The base Malibu S includes most expected features, but ascending to the LS or LT gets you additional premium kit.

MALIBU

Base Price (including destination):
$27,000

New Camaro is a power package

With the 2015 redesigned Ford Mustang and significantly updated Dodge Challenger models (including the mind-blowing 707-horsepower Hellcat version), what more could fans of old-school-style American muscle wish for? Well, that would be an all-new sixth-generation Chevrolet Camaro to keep pace with the competition.

Inside the 2016 edition, a completely modernized interior does away with the annoying tunnel-style gauge pods that weren't all that popular when they were installed in the original car nearly a half-century ago. The new dash is clearly more user-friendly, with a 20-centimetre screen displaying vital info between the tach and speedometer, and another optional screen of the same size on the control panel for the navigation, communications and audio systems.

The 2016 Camaro sticks with the same general look as the previous car. CONTRIBUTED

CAMARO

Base Price (including destination):
$31,700

The new car has a stiffer chassis and is slightly shorter and narrower than the 2015 model. The weight was also cut by as much as 175 kilograms. That amount relates to the base LT model equipped with a turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder that makes 275 horsepower and 295 pound-feet of torque. Of course the Camaro becomes heavier with the installation of either the 3.6-litre V6 (335 horsepower/284 pound-feet) or the Corvette-based 6.2-litre V8 (455 horsepower/455 pound-feet) that's exclusive to the SS trim.

There's no word yet whether or when the higher performing ZL1 or Z/28 models will show up, but given the racy Mustang GT350's 2016 return with 526 horsepower, it shouldn't be too long. The convertible version will join the coupe part way into the 2016 model year.

CRUZE

Base Price (including destination):
$18,500

CONTRIBUTED

LARGER, LIGHTER & SLEEKER

When viewing the spec sheets of General Motors' four other 2016 new models, it's apparent that weight reduction has been a principal objective in their development. That includes the 2016 Chevrolet Cruze that has tightened its belt to the tune of nearly 115 kilograms. That includes a 20-kilo reduction in engine weight from switching to aluminum from cast iron for the engine block and an 11-kilogram-lighter automatic transmission.

The car's basic architecture and suspension components have also slimed down. The Cruze's sheet metal is now among the more elegant in a compact-sedan class that includes some heavy hitters from Ford, Toyota, Nissan and Subaru.

The interior is also roomier, especially the rear seat that adults won't view as a penalty box. The rest of the cabin has extra soft-touch material covering the dashboard, door panels and floor console.

The engine lineup has been reduced to just a single offering for now; a turbocharged 1.4-litre four-cylinder that puts out 153 horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque. That's an increase of 15 horsepower and 29 pound-feet from the previous 1.4 turbo. Combined with the lighter structure, the Cruze should prove a peppy small car.

Handling the shifting duties is a six-speed manual transmission and optional six-speed automatic. While it's sad to see the muscular turbo-diesel depart, an all-new version is slated to arrive for the 2017 model year. Meanwhile, the previous non-turbo 1.8-litre four-cylinder base engine won't be missed.

The Cruze comes in four trim levels, starting with the L that includes air conditioning, rearview camera plus a fair assortment of convenience items such as a 19-centimetre touch-screen.

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MAKING A BOLD STATEMENT

Both models of the RX come well equipped, but should you desire more, there's an extensive array of options designed to further pamper you and keep you safe. CONTRIBUTED

The RX has been a trendsetter since it first arrived for the 1999 model year. In terms of style, the latest fourth-generation version is no different. With an angular grille, creased door panels and "floating" rear roof pillars, Lexus's franchise model doesn't beg for your attention, it practically demands it.

For 2016 the RX 350 and 450h hybrid variant have been stretched by about five centimetres between the front and rear wheels and about 10 centimetres in total length. That's good news for passengers who are treated to a cabin with additional rear-seat space and a larger stowage area for their stuff.

The RX 350 comes with a 3.5-litre V6 that produces 295 horsepower and 267 pound-feet of torque, while a newly standard eight-speed automatic transmission (previously offered only on the F-Sport trim) directs power to the front or both axles. The RX 450h functions with its own 259-horse-

RX

Base Price (including destination):
$53,000 (RX 350)

power version of the 3.5 V6, but combined with a pair of motor generators, it makes 308 horsepower. All-wheel-drive is standard for both gasoline and hybrid RX models; its electronically controlled system that can vary the torque between the front and rear wheels as well as from side to side, if necessary.

Options include an F Sport trim, available on RX 350 and 450h AWD models, features a continuously variable suspension that instantly adjusts to road and driving conditions, additional instrumentation, sport bucket seats, blacked-out grille and unique 10-spoke 20-inch wheels.

Luxury sedan grows in size and power

Every year since the third-generation IS's launch, Lexus has been making major changes to the little sedan, although for 2016 those are mostly found under the skin.

In front, the car adopts a hunkered-down stance, aided by what Lexus calls its "spindle" grille, that features LED fog lights. Compared to the previous generation, the redesigned IS has a 20 per cent-stiffer platform and it grew nearly nine centimetres in length with seven more centimetres between the front and rear wheels.

Width and height increase only slightly. Rear-seat riders benefited with a bit more leg and hip room, which was a drawback for the previous generation. The IS convertible has been killed because of the new RC coupe.

The IS now has three different models, starting with the new IS 200t replacing the IS 250. For it, the turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder (from the new NX line) produces 241 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque, which are good gains over the V6 that was in the 250. The also-new IS 300 uses the same 3.5-litre V6 as the 350, but with only 255 horsepower. That same V6 still produces 306 horses in the IS 350.

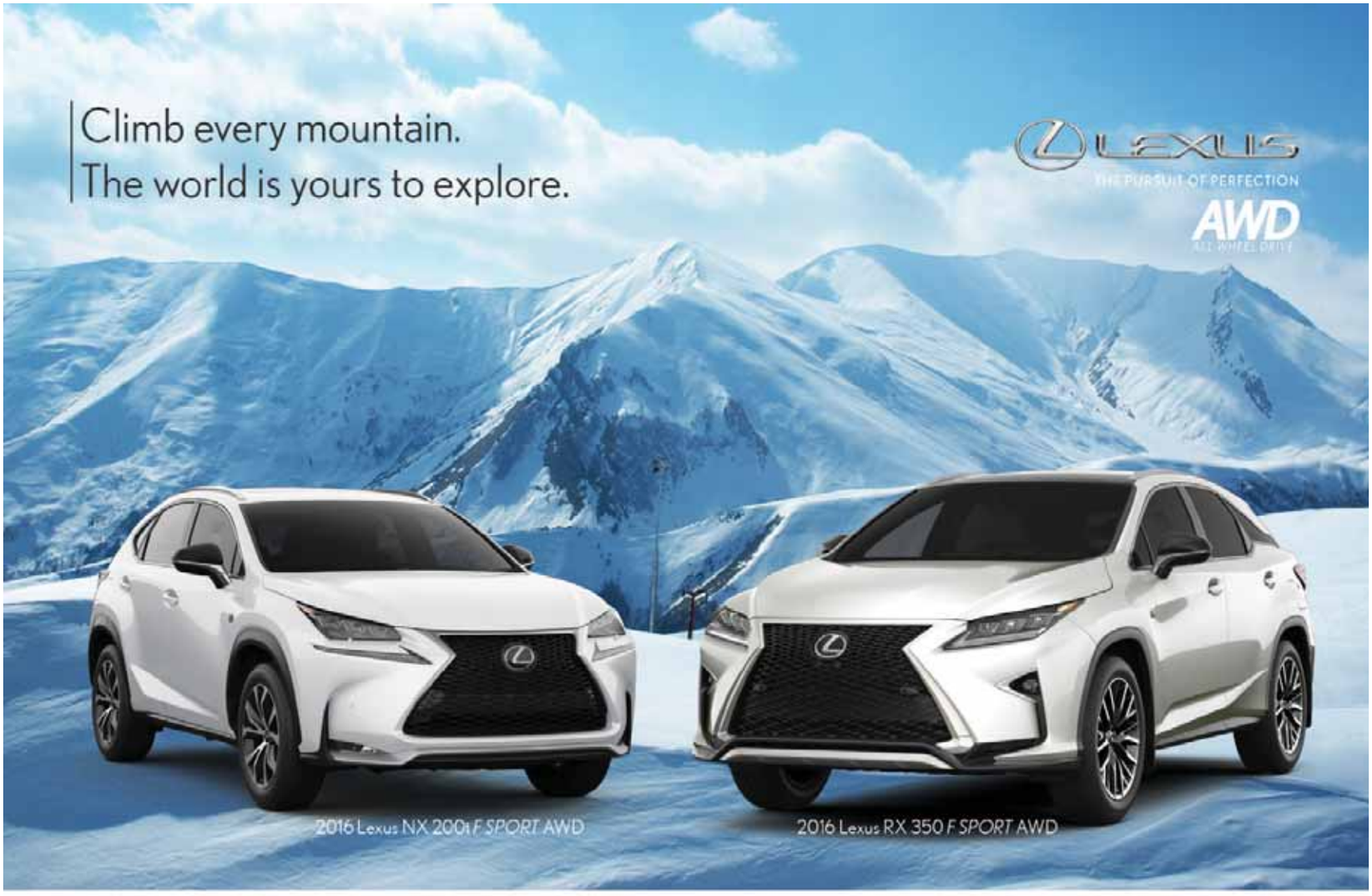
IS

Base Price (including destination):
$41,300 (IS 200t)

The IS 200t is exclusively rear-wheel drive, while the IS 300 only powers all four wheels. As before, the IS 350 can be either. Rear-drive IS models use the eight-speed automatic transmission, while all-wheel drive trims use the older six-speed automatic. The AWD system splits the torque evenly between the front and rear wheels in normal driving situations, but can transfer up to 70 per cent to the rear when front slippage is detected.

The IS line of sedans offers more modern engine choices. CONTRIBUTED

The IS has Drive Mode Select throttle and transmission programming, with ECO, NORMAL and SPORT S modes for rear-wheel-drive models, plus a SNOW mode for AWD-equipped cars. Additionally, the returning F SPORT package (optional on all IS sedans) adds a SPORT S+ setting that firms up the suspension for more spirited driving.



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Pushing all the right style buttons

Small boxes that offer all-wheel-drive are being directed toward singles, young couples and empty nesters alike, and for the same reasons: They're relatively inexpensive, a breeze to maneuver in congested urban and extra-urban environs, can navigate poor weather/ roads and can carry more gear than similarly sized small sedans or hatchbacks.

And don't forget they can be nattily attired in fancy accoutrements plus the latest in crash-mitigating safety technologies. As a companion to the CX-5 small wagon, the CX-3 is about 25 centimetres shorter, eight centimetres narrower and has 13 centimetres less distance between the front and rear wheels. It's also at least 180 kilograms more svelte than the 1,455-kilogram base CX-5.

The CX-3's cabin purposely exudes an MX-5 (Miata) sports-car-like feel that's interrupted only by a pop-up-style touch-screen display. The straightforward control-panel layout includes a trio of oversized knobs and a dashboard gauge pod flanked by twin info screens. There's not an excess of leg or headroom in back for adult-sized passengers, although the doors are at least wide enough for easy entry and exit. For storage, the CX-3 is about as spacious as most of its peers, whether the split-fold back seat is upright or flattened. A 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine delivers 146 horsepower and 146 pound-feet of torque.

It's uncommon for a non-turbocharged powerplant to produce that much twisting force, relative to horsepower, but Mazda's high-piston-compression SkyActiv design makes this possible. The sole available transmission is a six-speed automatic with optional paddle shifters. The on-demand all-wheel-drive system that's available in all trim levels is linked to the vehicle's anti-lock brakes, stability control and on-board ambient thermometer. It's designed to "predict" front-wheel slippage and divert power to the rear wheels.

Note that due to the space needed for the rear differential, AWD models lose some of their stowage capacity.

The Mazda CX-3's spunky and thrifty four-cylinder engine is mated to a six-speed automatic. CONTRIBUTED

CX-3

Base Price (including destination): $22,700

The world's best-selling roadster gets a reboot

At long last (10 model-years, to be exact), Mazda has introduced the fourth-generation of the world's all-time best-selling roadster. Compared to the outgoing Miata, the 2016 edition is considerably sleeker from grille to trunk lid.

The fenders now bulge aggressively out from the body, the grinning air intake has thankfully been toned down, and the truncated rear deck evokes thoughts of BMW's Z4 two-seater. The headlights appear influenced by Siamese cats' eyes. Mazda stylists cut the overall length down by nearly eight centimetres and reduced the distance between the front and rear wheels by about 2.5 centimetres.

A full-court press aimed at weight reduction has also yielded a not-insignificant 68-kilogram decrease, with the help of aluminum body panels and lightened components. The completely revamped cockpit is as clean as they come, including a trio of clearly marked gauges, oversize control knobs for the ventilation system and an available seven-inch touch-screen with voice command for the audio and communications units. The slick non-power soft-top (a power-operated retractable hardtop is not offered) takes only one hand to unlatch or secure it in place.

The MX-5's 2.0-litre four-cylinder engine is identical in displacement to the previous 2.0, but its peak horsepower is less (155 versus 167 horsepower), but 148 pound-feet of torque tops the older engine's 140 rating. The engine can be matched with a six-speed manual transmission or available six-speed automatic.

The base MX-5 GX arrives with air conditioning, a six-speaker stereo, push-button start and an aero wind blocker, while the GS adds a sport-tuned suspension with Bilstein-brand shocks, limited-slip differential, front suspension brace (manual-gearbox-models only), front and rear spoilers, Bose audio system with headrest speakers and 17-inch wheels (16-inchers are standard).

The top-level GT's upgrades encompass climate control, heated leather seats, navigation system and an insulated cloth-lined top. Extra GT safety features include lane-departure warning (for the inattentive driver) and blind-spot monitoring with cross-traffic alert (warns when other vehicles are approaching from behind on the highway and when you're backing up).

MX-5

Base Price (including destination): $33,800

The new 2.0-litre four-cylinder MX-5 is a sleek and stylish addition to the Mazda lineup, perfect for cruising in the open air. CONTRIBUTED

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10% APR Purchase Financing is available on 2015 CX-9. Based on a representative agreement using an offered pricing of $35,736 for the new 2015 CX-9 GS (GVSB85AA00) the cost of borrowing for an 84-month term is $0, monthly payment is $196 and total finance obligation is $35,736. **Based on a representative example using a finance price of $23,146/$24,741 for the 2016 CX-3 GX (HVXX86AA00)/2016 CX-5 GX (NVXX66AA00) at a rate of 2.99%/2.49% APR, the cost of borrowing for an 84-month term is $2,535/$2,244, bi-weekly payment is $141/$148, total finance obligation is $25,682/$26,986. Taxes are extra and required at the time of purchase. ‡Starting from price for 2015 Mazda3 GX (D4XK65AA00)/2016 CX-5 GX AT AWD (NXXK86AB00)/2016 CX-3 GX (HXXK86AA00)/2015 CX-9 GS (GVSB85AA00) is $14,999/$29,288/$$24,999/$34,265 and includes a cash discount of $2,750/$1,250/$0/$5,000. The cash discount applies to the cash purchase only and is deducted from the negotiated pre-tax price and cannot be combined with subsidized purchase financing or leasing rates. $500 discount on 2015 Mazda3 is only available to existing Mazda owners. Mazda Owner Renewal cash discounts cannot be combined with Mazda Owner Renewal rate discounts or with SDA rates. All prices include block heater, $20 new tire charge, $100 a/c charge where applicable, freight & PDI of $1,695/$1,895 for Mazda3/CX-3, CX-5, CX-9. As shown, price for 2015 Mazda3 GT (D4TL65AA00)/2016 CX-3 GT (HXTX86AA00)/2016 CX-5 GT (NXTL86AA00)/2015 CX-9 (GXTB85AA00) is $28,115/$31,315/$37,215/$48,265. PPSA, licence, insurance, taxes, down payment (or equivalent trade-in) are extra and may be required at the time of purchase. Dealer may sell/lease for less. Dealer order/trade may be necessary on certain vehicles. Lease and Finance on approved credit for qualified customers only. Offers valid January 5 - February 1, 2016, while supplies last. Prices and rates subject to change without notice. Visit mazda.ca or see your dealer for complete details. †To learn more about the Mazda Unlimited Warranty, go to mazdaunlimited.ca. i-Activ AWD feature is not available on Mazda3 models.

TOYOTA KEEPS TRUCK WELL-EQUIPPED

While a full model replacement is some years away, Toyota keeps building on the Tundra's positives in an attempt to be more appealing in a tough market segment.

The pickup's recent mid-cycle facelift incorporated a new hood and re-profiled grille, along with a three-piece lower bumper and squared-off fenders and wheel wells. However, the overall profile hasn't changed: Tundras continue to be available in your choice of Regular-cab, extended-length Double Cab and four-door CrewMax with its extra-sized rear doors.

The powertrain carries over with a standard 310-horsepower 4.6-litre V8 and top-tuned 381-horsepower 5.7-litre V8. Both use six-speed automatic transmissions. Four-wheel-drive is optional, but only if you specify the V8.

Inside, the roomy cabins features several improvements to make life easier for the driver, including moving the HVAC and audio controls six centimetres closer. New seats feature better ventilation and can also travel more. Base regular-cab models actually come fairly well equipped with air conditioning and a 15.5-centimetre touch-screen display with Bluetooth connectivity and a backup camera. Adding more doors to the cab automatically gets you more, although many of those standard features can be added to regular-cab models by choosing the SR5 Package and the SR5 Plus Package.

The Tundra offers a choice of two V8s that produce 310 and 381 horsepower. CONTRIBUTED

TUNDRA

Base Price (including destination):
$30,700 (regular cab)

There's not enough room here to discuss the 10 models and 25 available configurations, but noteworthy is the Platinum that includes perforated diamond-pleated leather seats and instrument panel, along with plenty of chrome touches, a 12-speaker JBL-brand touch-screen audio system, navigation and heated and cooled seats.

The Platinum 1794 Edition is Toyota's take on Ford's King Ranch or Ram's Laramie Longhorn. As a true "factory option," it's billed as a tribute to the ranch, founded in the year 1794, where the Tundra plant is located in Texas.

You get saddle-brown leather touches with suede inserts, and similar luxury equipment to the Platinum. Both the Platinum and Platinum 1794 are 4x4 machines available only with the four-door CrewMax cab.

The four-cylinder Tacoma is paired with a five-speed manual transmission, while the V6 gets a six-speed unit. CONTRIBUTED

Restyled with options galore

The Tacoma remains the automaker's top-selling pickup, out-doing the full size Tundra by a fair margin. The 2016 redesign displays a bolder hexagonal grille and the fenders show more flare/flair. Without the regular-cab Tacoma in the lineup the extended Access Cab and four-door Double Cab are your only choices.

The restyled interior environment benefits from a sound-absorbing headliner, a "floor silencer pad," thicker door seals and multi-layer acoustic windshield. Returning for base-engine duty is a 2.7-litre four-cylinder that makes 159 horsepower and 180 pound-feet of torque. Optional is a new 3.5-litre V6 that produces 278 horsepower and 265 pound-feet of torque, which replaces the 4.0-litre V6 with its 236 horsepower and 266 pound-feet.

The base SR Access Cab — the work truck of the bunch — is understandably thin on comfort/features, but does include air conditioning, a six-inch touch-screen, six-speaker audio system and a windshield mount for your GoPro-brand video camera.

The SR5 adds a sliding rear glass panel, cruise control, remote keyless entry and an enhanced audio/communications package while the TRD (Toyota Racing Development) Sport and Off-Road trims put a rough-and-tumble spin on the Tacoma.

The Limited lives it up with, literally, a truckload of luxury items ranging from leather-covered seats, navigation system and a power moonroof to chrome trim with 18-inch polished wheels.

TACOMA

Base Price (including destination):
$29,700

UNCOMPROMISING QUALITY

Toyota's hard-working truck stubbornly refuses to become a jacked-up car.

To make it easy to spot, the 4Runner features a recently redesigned snout with more angular projector beam headlights with smoked lenses, and a huge lower grille and bumper. The 270-horsepower 4.0-litre V6 that as Goldilocks once famously declared "is just right". Also standard is a five-speed-automatic transmission.

You get to choose between a part-time four-wheel-drive system with a two-speed transfer case, or upgrade at extra cost to a full-time unit with a locking centre differential controlled by a console switch. Dashboards and other interior bits are similarly refreshed, with softer materials and leather-wrapped steering wheel and a new audio system.

Base SR5 4Runners feature climate control, multi-adjustable power driver's seat, eight airbags (including two front-knee inflatables) and chrome roof rails, Hill Start Assist that keeps the vehicle from rolling backward when stopped on an incline and Hill Descent Control to prevent unintended acceleration on a downward slope.

The Trail Edition lives up to its name by including a system that sets the vehicle at a specific speed while operating in low range over extremely rough ground. Instead of bouncing your foot back and forth between the brake and throttle, you just have to work the brake. The Trail can also disconnect the stabilizer bars for added suspension travel.

The package includes a sliding rear cargo deck that can support up to 200 kilograms.

Limited 4Runner package content includes a touch-screen and on-screen apps (optional in lower trims), leather interior, 15-speaker audio system and a backup camera. CONTRIBUTED

4RUNNER

Base Price (including destination):
$39,000

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LEGENDARY TRUCK GETS A NEW LOOK

Only into its third model year and Chevrolet is giving its legendary Silverado line a good-old facelift.

The front end sees a taller grille, with squintier headlights replacing the "old" upright ones. Upscale models will get LED running and fog lights, while high-intensity-discharge (HID) headlights are available.

The front bumper and lower fascia are reshaped too, but the rest of the truck still looks familiar. Behind the tailgate, the handy "Corner Step" bumper has recessed footholds that, combined with built-in handholds inside the box, make accessing the bed much easier.

All body styles — regular, extended Double Cab (featuring front-hinged rear doors with outside handles) and four-door Crew Cab — are attached to frames with lots of high-strength steel, extra bracing for stiffness and body mounts that help isolate road noise and vibration. You can order the Crew Cab with a longer 80-inch bed (the standard bed is 68 inches) and you'll get a choice of three all-aluminum engines.

The entry point is a 4.3-litre V6 that has the same displacement as the previous V6, but output has significantly increased to 285 horsepower and 305 pound-feet of torque from 195/260. Optional is a 5.3-litre V8 with 355 horses and 383 pound-feet. An available 6.2-litre V8 is rated at 420 horsepower and 440 pound-feet and shares much of its guts with the Corvette engine, but for 2016 both V8s get the Corvette's eight-speed automatic transmission.

The Silverado's line of "Ecotec3" engines has direct fuel injection and variable valve timing for broader power range and improved economy. CONTRIBUTED

SILVERADO

Base Price (including destination): $29,750 (2015)

The V6 carries over with a six-speed automatic. Although rough-and-tumble pickup truck, the Silverado's model range also extends to include a premium "High Country" model to appeal to wealthy ranchers and city slickers.

The best part about this truck is its highly-optioned leather interior that places it above the previous top-of-the-line LTZ. Also for 2016 is an available built-in Wi-Fi hot spot to allow all aboard to access the Internet. There will also be support for both Android Auto and Apple CarPlay, along with more active safety technologies, too.

The Silverado HD is available from bare bones to serious luxury. CONTRIBUTED

Truck tech gets smarter

Chevrolet's 2500- and 3500-series heavy-duty trucks are intended to be hard-working commercial rigs. That's why the stuff they haul is called "payload" since someone is most likely writing the HD owner/operator a check for transporting some very heavy and/or valuable gear.

The usual cab styles return, including the double-cab with rear doors that are hinged at the front. As well, both the 66-inch and 96-inch cargo boxes were strengthened and the rear bumper has built-in recessed steps at each corner for easier access. All HD powertrains return unaltered for 2016. The base 6.0-litre gasoline V8 puts out 360 horsepower and 380 pound-feet of torque. Chevrolet also offers a bi-fuel version of the 6.0 that can be switched from gasoline to natural gas, although power drops to 301 horses and 333 pound-feet.

For serious grunt, there's the optional 6.6-litre turbo-diesel V8 rated at 397 horsepower and 765 pound-feet of torque. Both engines use six-speed automatic transmissions: a GM-developed Hydramatic comes with the 6.0; and the turbo-diesel employs an Allison-built unit.

For the 2016 model year, the Sierra HD gains available active steering assist, which helps keep the truck in its lane regardless of regardless of load. Also new this year is the way he HD's maximum towing is measured, which means conventional towing capacity is up to 9,070 kilograms, while fifth-wheel capacity remains 10,525 kilos.

Since the uses for an HD pickup vary greatly, the standard and optional HD equipment on the WT (Work Truck), LT and LTZ trim levels is tremendous.

SILVERADO HD

Base Price (including destination): $38,200 (2015)

MID-SIZE GROOVE IS BACK

The mid-size pickup market seemed like an empty toy box until the 2015 model year when General Motors relaunched the Chevrolet Colorado and close facsimile GMC Canyon pickups after a three-year absence. Both are bigger and more powerful forms, but remain smaller and less capable than the full-size Chevy Silverado/GMC Sierra.

Still, for many pickup fans, they have plenty to offer, whether it's the four-door extended-cab with a 62-inch box, or the four-door crew cab that comes with a 50-inch, or available 62-inch bed (there is no regular-cab available).

Each cab style can be had with a 200-horsepower 2.5-litre four-cylinder, or optional 305-horsepower V6. For 2016, they are joined by third option: a 2.8-litre turbo-diesel four-cylinder. The Duramax-badged engine produces 181 horsepower and a V6-trouncing 369 pound-feet of torque.

A six-speed manual transmission is standard with the 2.5, while a six-speed automatic is optional, but standard with the V6 and turbo-diesel. Interestingly, the V6 comes very close to matching the four-cylinder in the mileage department (13.6 l/100 km in the city and 9.9 on the highway versus 13.0/9.2 for rear-wheel-drive models), although the new turbo-diesel will probably trump them both when its final figures are announced.

The turbo-diesel now becomes the go-to model when hauling payloads up to 815 kilograms (up from 725 with the V6) or trailering up to 3,500 kilograms, up 315 from the V6.

There are, of course, a plethora of options and packages for the Colorado, including leather seats (heated in front), eight-inch touch-screen, navigation system, and a factory-installed spray-on bed liner. In terms of safety, forward-collision alert and lane-departure warning can be added (a rear-vision camera is standard).

COLORADO

Base Price (including destination): $22,900

Colorados can be had in base, WT (Work Truck), LT and Z71 4x4 trim levels, although the diesel is only available in the higher two. CONTRIBUTED

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RIDING WAVE OF SUCCESS

Base-model Tahoes offer plenty of standard gear, including a new standard eight-inch touch-screen and an available head-up display. CONTRIBUTED

The Tahoe underwent a complete transformation for the 2015 model year, resulting in a sleeker, lighter shape, a more economical and powerful engine and added safety and content.

The trimmer sheetmetal and the stylish grille create the impression that the Tahoe is a bit smaller than before, but the tape measure proves that not much has really changed. It's a different story inside where max stowage volume has actually decreased slightly, possibly because the third-row seats now fold flat for added capacity and are no longer removable.

The Tahoe's body is attached to a stronger ladder frame that slightly widens the distance between the left and right wheels for greater stability. Mounted between the rails is a 5.3-litre V8 that produces 355 horsepower and 383 pound-feet of torque. This all-aluminum engine has direct fuel injection (fuel is force-fed directly into the cylinders under high pressure) and continuously variable valve timing (that alters valve-lift duration to improve performance). In addition, a program reduces cylinder function to four from eight under light cruising situations, which improves fuel economy.

These features plus a lighter engine and improved aerodynamics help the Tahoe achieve 14.9 l/100 km in the city and 10.1 l/100 km on the highway (slightly higher when the optional four-wheel-drive is added). The only transmission is a six-speed automatic with steering-wheel "TapShift" controls. The 2016 Tahoe comes in LS, LT and LTZ flavors.

For crash protection, the Tahoe comes with an available front-seat center air bag that provides protection between front passengers in the event of a side impact.

TAHOE

Base Price (including destination):
$53,000 (2015)

Fine style and family function

With Chevrolet's latest truck-based Tahoe and Suburban still dominating headlines, it can be difficult to get similar room and seating capacity without their body-on-frame farm-vehicle roots. Car-based tall wagons with three-row seating promise plenty when it comes to saving fuel and being easier to drive.

In GM's stable, the Traverse represents the least-expensive way to get into GM's people-hauling triplets (the GMC Acadia and the Buick Enclave are the other two), and it went under the surgeon's scalpel for 2013 and came out with sharper features and more content.

The split grille seen on nearly all Chevy cars and trucks is gone, replaced by the company's new face. The gold bowtie sits on a trapezoidal grille with a trio of larger air intakes below the bumper. The back end didn't change as dramatically, but it featured new lights.

The interior was equally freshened with nicer materials where you'll actually touch, a redesigned center stack with the color touch-screen radio and contrasting stitching all over. Traverse has a 3.6-litre V6 that produces 281 horsepower, or 288 ponies with the optional dual exhaust.

The 2016 Traverse can be turned into a wireless mobile hot spot. CONTRIBUTED

TRAVERSE

Base Price (including destination):
$35,700

The engine operates through a six-speed automatic transmission and the optional all-wheel-drive system distributes power to either the front or rear wheels, depending on road conditions and driver inputs.

On the long list of available content, of which some will be standard on higher models, are new 20-inch wheels (17-inch alloys are standard), perforated-leather seats, heated and cooled front buckets, power liftgate, power-folding mirrors, premium audio system and individual sunroofs for the first two rows.

EQUINOX

Base Price (including destination):
$28,200

CONTRIBUTED

CHEVY'S TALL WAGON GETS UPDATE

Although it has remained a popular machine after nearly six years in its current form, Chevrolet has given the Equinox a new lease on life.

The front features new fascia, grille and reshaped projector-beam headlamps that are standard on all trims. On higher levels, there are also integrated LED running lights and fog lights.

Out back, there's a similar change, including revised tail-lamps and bumper. Most models get new-style 17-inch wheels, with 18-inchers on the top trim. What hasn't changed are the clever touches abound in the design, like the integrated rocker panels in the doors that reduce entry step-up height. (They also help keep pant legs from brushing up against the vehicle's lower body area.)

The interior is likely the Equinox's best asset. It has been heavily revised with a new center stack that houses a standard seven-inch color-touch radio.

A 182-horsepower 2.4-litre four-cylinder reigns as a base engine with its 21/32 mpg city/highway fuel-economy rating. The optional 3.6-litre V6 with 301 horsepower outclasses every other compact tall wagon in the segment. It earns a 17/25 mpg rating, which is pretty solid given the power level. A six-speed automatic transmission is standard with either engine.

A wide assortment of standard equipment (air conditioning, cruise control, keyless remote entry and power windows/locks/mirrors, etc.) comes in base versions, as does a seven-inch touch-screen to work the standard audio system.

Moving up into the top-line models adds climate control, heated leather seats, extra trim and premium audio. New safety features include available side-blind-zone alert and rear-cross-traffic alert. The OnStar-based in-car Wi-Fi hot-spot that's standard with a three-month trial carries over.

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BIG AND BOLD RIG FOR EVERY TASK

GMC's giant-sized Yukon rigs are specialists at heavy hauling in all kinds of road conditions and with up to eight people on board. For 2015, they were made better looking with sharply creased bodywork and handsome grilles for the standard versions and the extended-by-20-inches XL.

As well there's a unique nose for the posh Denali and Denali XL. Although both configurations can hold up to eight people, the XL's extra space is completely dedicated to cargo room. Previous Yukons could hold up to nine people, but the three-person front bench that made it happen is no longer part of the deal. Interior Yukon/Denali highlights include a fashionable dashboard and control panel complete with a five- or available eight-inch touch-screens that work the infotainment and communications systems.

The Yukon and XL come with a 5.3-litre V8 that makes 355 horsepower. Key upgrades include direct fuel injection that can tailor the fuel entering the engine to the actual load and not just the revs per minute.

The Yukon comes with a Wi-Fi Internet connectivity for all aboard as part of a paid subscription through GM's OnStar concierge/emergency help system. CONTRIBUTED

The 420-horsepower 6.2-litre V8, which is based on the Chevrolet Corvette engine with direct fuel injection and variable valve timing, is a Denali exclusive.

The engine is mated to an eight-speed automatic transmission. Both regular- and extended-length models come in SLE, mid-level SLT and Denali trim levels with a wide assortment of gear specific to each package.

Among the Denali's numerous special touches are power fold-and-tumble second-row bucket seats, hands-free power liftgate (opens with a kicking motion below the bumper), wireless phone charging, heated and cooled leather seating surfaces, power adjustable pedals, heated windshield-washer system, automatic wipers, Bose-brand 10-speaker surround-sound audio system including (XM satellite radio) and climate control.

Minor additions for 2016 include a driver alert package that now includes lane-keep assist and automatic high-beams, and a capless fuel filler.

YUKON

Base Price (including destination):
$53,100; $75,900 (Denali) (2015)

Canyons can be had in base SL, SLE and SLT trim levels. CONTRIBUTED

Small package really delivers

When it comes to trucks and sport utility vehicles, General Motors tends to do things in pairs. Both the Chevrolet and GMC divisions share many similar, but moderately restyled vehicles wearing different nameplates, including the new-for-2015 Canyon and its Chevy iteration, the Colorado.

Of course, they're still smaller and less capable than the full-size Sierra and Silverado, but for many buyers, they have plenty to offer, whether it's the four-door extended-cab with a 62-inch box, or the four- (full) door crew cab that comes with a 50-inch, or available 62-inch bed (there are no regular-cab versions).

Each style can be ordered with a 200-horsepower 2.5-litre four-cylinder or a 305-horsepower V6. For 2016, they are joined by third option: a 2.8-litre turbo-diesel four-cylinder. The Duramax-badged engine produces 181 horsepower and 369 pound-feet of torque, which is only 11 shy of the 6.0-litre V8 in the Sierra HD. A six-speed manual transmission is standard with the 2.5, while a six-speed automatic is optional, but standard with the V6 and turbo-diesel.

The Duramax becomes the go-to model when hauling payloads up to 820 kilograms (up from 725 with the V6) or trailering up to 3,500 kilograms (up 315 from the V6). That's also more than double the 2.5's capacity.

All Canyons come with a power driver's seat, corner steps built into the rear bumper, locking tailgates and two-tier loading that, by sliding braces and a platform that you supply, creates two separate cargo areas. There are, of course, a plethora of options and packages, including leather seats (heated in front), 20-centimetre touch-screen/navigation, and a factory-installed spray-on bed liner.

CANYON

Base Price (including destination):
$23,300 (2015)

Truck gets new look, many more features

When it launched two years ago, the full model change for the Sierra/Silverado pickups wasn't quite the dramatic makeover that some General Motors fans expected. However, for 2016, things are improving.

The Sierra gets its first significant visual changes, which include a new grille, front fascia and standard high-intensity-discharge (HID) headlights and LED running lights. On up-level trims, like the All Terrain and Denali, there are also full LED headlights and taillights.

These exterior changes mean more basic GMC models are less tilted towards the "Professional Grade" tag, and more towards the Sierra Denali sub-brand that places a much higher value on coddling content. In either case, the Sierra's primary identification point can be spotted in your rearview mirror. Some minor sheetmetal differences exist between the Chevy and the GMC, but that's about it.

Even the interiors of the two pickups share the same basic dash, control panel and available touch-screen communications center that are a masterstroke of efficient legibility. Of course as you scale the trim-level ladder the appointments become more luxurious and the cabin resembles something approaching a high-end limo, especially in the four-door crew-cab models.

Improvements in aerodynamics, insulation and weather sealing help shut out intrusive noises. Just as a greater use of aluminum in fabricating various body panels and suspension parts has kept the Sierra's weight in check, the three engines also benefit. All use aluminum cylinder blocks and direct injection, whereby fuel is force-fed — very precisely — into the cylinders under high pressure.

The base 4.3-litre V6 makes 285 horsepower and a solid 305 pound-feet of torque. V8 choices consist of a 5.3-litre unit with 355 horses and 383 pound-feet, and a 6.2-litre piece rated at 420/450 pound-feet.

For 2016, not only the larger of the V8 engines gets an eight-speed automatic transmission, but also the 5.3 in pricier trims. It remains standard in the fancier Sierra Denali, not to mention a rather substantial list of content that includes unique 20-inch chrome and wood and leather innards, along with standard magnetic ride control.

SIERRA

Base Price (including destination):
$28,200 (2015)

Three Sierra engines all have aluminum cylinder blocks and direct fuel injection, which makes a big difference to power and fuel economy. CONTRIBUTED

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STILL A GAME-CHANGER

The V6 and V8 engines in the F-150 are joined by two turbocharged "EcoBoost" V6s. CONTRIBUTED

There were plenty of naysayers claiming that the world's best-selling pickup might have lost its crown to General Motors and Ram. But a year into its new life, and Ford's adoption of aluminum body panels for the F-150 remains one heck of a game changer, and in more ways than one.

Ford's switch from steel to aluminum body panels more averse to dents, dings and rust saved as much as 315 kilograms (Ford claims), depending on whether you're talking about regular-, extended SuperCab or four-door SuperCrew versions. All are perched on a new ladder-type frame that's also stronger and actually lighter by a few pounds.

The reduced heft allows properly kitted-out F-150s to tote and tow bigger payloads, which is what pickup trucks are all about, right?

For 2016, a new optional Pro Trailer Backup system combines a revised rear-view camera with more helpful lines on the display and a standalone knob that drivers can twist back and forth to guide the truck exactly where it needs to go.

Under the hood, base trucks come with a 3.5-litre V6 with 283 horsepower and 255 pound-feet of torque, while a twin-turbo 2.7-litre V6 that's rated at 325 horsepower and 375 pound-feet of torque is optional. Carried over from last year are two of Ford's workhorse powerplants: a 3.5-litre twin-turbocharged V6 producing 365 horsepower and 420 pound-feet of torque; and a 5.0-litre V8 worth 385 horsepower and 387 pound-feet of torque.

The old 6.2-litre V8 that was standard in the way-off-road-capable SVT Raptor has been dropped, with the second-gen Baja bruiser getting a version of the all-new 600-horsepower 3.5-litre twin-turbo V6 found in the stunning Ford GT supercar. Inside, the cabin, or "office" for many truck owners, was completely transformed and in up-level models approaches luxury-car standards, particularly the Lariat and King Ranch trims.

F-150

Base Price (including destination): $25,200 (2015)

Wagon has plenty for families

It seems like Ford's potential customers might not have read the company's press and promotional material when considering a Transit Connect Wagon.

No matter how many times the company uses phrases like "un-minivan," one glance at the dual sliding doors will be clue enough. As well, the big-roofed rig can seat up to seven people comfortably enough to confirm that "minivan" is the most relevant designation, even if it's from Europe.

The TC Wagon is the junior-sized civilian offshoot of a series of windowless commercial-vans heading to North America from Ford's factory in Spain. Size-wise, it falls into the compact class, which means it's significantly smaller than more traditional minivans from Chrysler, Toyota and Honda.

The TC Wagon is offered in five- and seven-passenger sizes that are separated by nearly 40 centimetres in length, as well as the distance between the front and rear wheels.

The TC Wagon is a civilian version of the popular commercial vehicle. CONTRIBUTED

TRANSIT CONNECT

Base Price (including destination): $25,200 (2015)

The five-passenger TC Wagon's just-right size is more aesthetically pleasing, but for larger families the elongated seven-seat version will likely get the nod.

With three trim levels — XL, XLT and Titanium — it can be spiced up just about any way you want, from utilitarian basic to full-on premium class transporter with leather seat coverings, king-size panoramic glass roof, a navigation system with 6.5-inch screen, fancy wheels, upgraded sound system and other niceties.

You can select either a cargo-van-style side-hinged rear doors or a more traditional liftgate. In either case, the split-folding second-row — and the dual fore-and-aft-sliding third-row seats found in extended models — can be flattened for maximum stowage. The TC Wagon will accommodate up to 545 kilograms of cargo and tow up to 900 kilos.

The starting point engine is a 169-horsepower 2.5-litre four-cylinder, while a 178-horsepower turbocharged 1.6-litre four-cylinder "EcoBoost" powerplant is optional. Power is directed to the front wheels through a six-speed automatic transmission.

F-SERIES SUPER DUTY

Base Price (including destination): $37,500

CONTRIBUTED

SERIES REMAINS SUPER

While the benefits of Ford's aluminum-intensive F-150 seem to be paying dividends, in the big, brutish class where the Super Duty rules, there's no such luck yet. Ford has worked magic to keep the stat-creep war with its rivals going strong.

For 2015, the commercial-grade F-350 and F-450 got things like larger wheels and tires, revised suspension and even bigger brakes for the latter that are more effective at shedding heat (there's a larger parking brake, too). Regular F-250 models kept their payload capacity at 3,290 kilograms and conventional towing capacity tops out at 8,390 kilos, which appears to be edged out slightly by the new GMC Sierra HD and the Silverado.

In this league, though, it's really splitting hairs. Ford also now aims its Super Duty trucks toward the higher end of the market. A fully-loaded GMC Sierra HD 3500 with the ubiquitous Denali package starts just south of $60,000 and climbs higher very quickly.

Ford's reply was to add a Platinum trim to the SD line with unique styling, different 20-inch wheels, chrome slathered everywhere, while inside features wood trim and high-grain leather cover nearly every surface.

Niceties include standard power-adjustable pedals, a rear-view camera, remote start and power telescoping mirrors. The Platinum also gets Ford's SD-specific version of MyFord Touch infotainment, which has larger buttons and knobs for secondary controls that can actually be used with work gloves on.

For those wanting more traditional luxury, the cowboy-themed King Ranch is back with similar improvements and features. As well, the standard 6.2-litre gasoline V8 that rules the roost with 385 horsepower and 405 pound-feet of torque remains unchanged.

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A COMFORTABLE, ROOMY RIDE

The Pathfinder has proven itself to be a popular choice among buyers with families who need enough seats for themselves and their offspring. When not loaded up with passengers, the Pathfinder has plenty of space for cargo, camping gear, sports equipment or binge-buying Costco runs. Whatever the need, this big Nissan can probably handle it.

The Pathfinder also has no problem getting up to steam thanks to a 3.5-litre V6 that generates 260 horsepower and 240 pound-feet of torque. It's teamed with a continuously variable transmission (CVT) that does reasonably well operating in a similar fashion to a traditional automatic. Note that for 2016, Nissan has deleted the Hybrid Pathfinder.

Still offered, of course, is Nissan's All-Mode 4x4-i option allows you to select either two- or four-wheel-drive or engage the "Auto" setting and let the system make the call, based on which tire/tires has/have traction. Heading downhill is easier with the Pathfinder's standard hill-descent control for all 4x4 models.

The Pathfinder's 3.5-litre V6 generates 260 horsepower and 240 pound-feet of torque. CONTRIBUTED

For passengers, the second-row split-folding seat comes with 14 centimetres of fore and aft travel and can be tipped forward to access the third row even if a child's booster seat has been attached. The available third row seat (also split-folding) reclines for greater comfort.

The base Pathfinder S arrives with tri-zone climate control and 14 beverage holders. The SV adds roof rails and a rearview monitor while leather-covered seats, remote engine start, heated steering wheel and a power liftgate are SL highlights. From there the sky's the limit where the SL Premium, Platinum and Platinum Premium trim levels are concerned.

Depending the depth of your pockets, you can add an up-level sound system, "Around View" camera (projects a 360-degree compilation image from overhead vantage onto the touch-screen), panorama moonroof, navigation system and new-for-2015 rear entertainment package with dual seven-inch screens.

PATHFINDER

Base Price (including destination):
$33,000

Available features on the Titan includes trailer brake and sway control systems. CONTRIBUTED

New generation of strength

It took a while — 12 years to be exact — but Nissan has finally come out with a second-generation Tennessee-built Titan pickup that will duke it out with the Ford F-150, Ram 1500, Toyota Tundra and General Motors' Chevrolet Silverado and GMC Sierra.

These trucks represent pretty formidable competition and the Titan would appear to have plenty of terra firma to make up. Likely for that reason, Nissan is initially sending out only the strongest and best-equipped Titan.

The XD crew cab features a 5.0-litre V8 supplied by Cummins that's rated at 310 horsepower, but, more importantly, a stump-pulling 550 pound-feet of torque. It's mated to a heavy-duty six-speed automatic transmission.

Thus equipped, the Titan will offer up to 910 kilograms of payload and 5,450 kilograms maximum towing (a gooseneck trailer hitch is built into the bed). However, by the spring of 2016, the crew cab will be joined by both regular- and extended-cab Titans that can be ordered with a V6 or V8 gasoline engine. Four-wheel-drive will be optional in the XD, as it probably will be in extended-cab gas V8 units when they come to market. The list of available features includes a rearview monitor with trailer guides, as well as an around-view monitor that shows front, rear and side views, all at the same time. "Moving Object Detection" warns of large objects in front or in back when the Titan is running and the transmission is in gear.

Ultimately, with S, SV, PRO-4X, SL and Platinum Reserve models available, buyers will have plenty to choose from, even before the remaining lineup members show up for duty.

TITAN

Base Price (including destination):
$29,700

SNAPPY WAGON STANDS TALL

In case you weren't aware, buyers of compact and mid-size-sedans are shifting their transportation priorities and snapping up tall wagons of varying sizes. The Nissan Rogue is one of the top segment contenders, alongside the Honda CR-V, Toyota RAV4, Ford Escape, Chevrolet Equinox and Hyundai Tucson. Introduced for the 2014 model year, the current Rogue shows plenty of exterior and interior styling class.

The latter comes in the form of an available third-row seat. Sure, it's tight on space back there and, when deployed, pretty much wipes out any semblance of cargo space. But it's also there for occasional use and makes the Rogue practically the only small-and-tall wagon to offer seven-passenger seating.

The standard powerplant continues to be a 2.5-litre four-cylinder rated at 170 horsepower and 175 pound-feet of torque. It's matched to a continuously variable transmission with a sport mode for snappier performance. For this version of the CVT, Nissan focused on reducing friction (by a claimed 40 per cent) and improving the transmission's belt and pulley system for better operating efficiency.

Neat interior features include the Divide-N-Hide cargo system (a two-tier load floor), and all the usual power goodies. For 2016, "Forward Emergency Braking," which can bring the Rogue to a complete stop before colliding with the car in front, is available on the SL trim.

All models of the Rogue continue to be available with all-wheel-drive. CONTRIBUTED

ROGUE

Base Price (including destination):
$39,000

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SHOWING CIVIC PRIDE

Honda classes up its compact-car act with sharp-looking 10th-generation sedan and coupe models. CONTRIBUTED

Honda introduced the 2016 Civic coupe and sedan during a live-streaming press conference in September, only to leave out pretty much every significant detail, from power and options, to price.

That info will come out in due course, but for now it's known that a 2.0-litre four-cylinder will be the standard engine on Civic LX and EX models, while a turbocharged 1.5-litre four-cylinder (the first turbo engine in a Honda product to be sold in North America) will find its way inside the premium EX-T, Ex-L and Touring trim levels.

A six-speed manual transmission and optional continuously variable unit (CVT) can be matched to the 2.0, while the 1.5 turbo gets its own unique CVT. The Civic sedan grows by 3.0 centimetres in wheelbase, is 5.1 centimetres wider and sits 2.5 centimetres closer to the ground. These changes will make the Civic the roomiest in the compact-sedan class, says Honda.

CIVIC

Base Price (including destination):
$18,000

The coupe's dimensions should similarly increase, but Honda isn't launching it until mid-way into the 2016 model year. At that time it's expected that an all-new Civic hatchback will arrive and hot Si coupe and sedan will also return.

Meanwhile, the sedan's new platform is now 25 per cent stiffer while dropping a bit of weight. Among the list of available new features is a full range of crash-avoiding software that falls under the Honda Sensing label. These include forward-collision and road-departure warnings and adaptive cruise control that slows down or stops the vehicle in stop-and-go driving situations.

Utility rules with extra appeal

Honda's third-generation Pilot sheds its previous boxy structure that made it look the part of a proper boulder basher. The automaker has determined that a softened appearance will broaden the Pilot's already broad appeal.

That same approach has worked well with the Toyota Highlander, Nissan Pathfinder and Chevrolet Traverse, whose utility also caters to family life.

The new Pilot grows by nine centimetres in overall length and by nearly two inches between the front and rear wheels. The roofline is slightly lower for improved aerodynamics. The changes mean a bit more passenger legroom plus slightly more room behind the third-row seat. The rear side door openings make third-row access a bit easier while pushbuttons on the outer edges of the second-row bench, or newly optional individual high-back chairs, make them super easy to slide and tilt forward.

The Pilot seats up to eight passengers, has moving-van stowage capacity and comes with a standard V6 engine. CONTRIBUTED

The engine is the latest rendition of Honda's 3.5-litre V6 that makes 280 horsepower and 262 pound-feet of torque, up from the previous 250/253 rating. Base models come with a six-speed automatic transmission, while top-end versions employ a nine-speed transmission.

All-wheel-drive is optional with LX, EX and EX-L but standard with Touring. Unlike most competing systems, the AWD can direct 100 per cent of the rear torque to the outside wheel while turning, without applying braking force to the inside wheel. The resulting "torque vectoring" creates more corning control/stability with reduced understeer (the natural tendency for the vehicle to travel in a straight line when the steering wheel is turned).

AWD-equipped Pilots also have "Intelligent Traction Management" that lets the driver vary torque delivery to the four wheels via Normal, Snow, Mud and Sand settings. Over the road, a combination of less heft, more power, and AWD improvements provide the Pilot with impressive acceleration with a noticeable crispness in the turns, which is a quality that many of its competitors lack. We're not talking sports car-like by any means, but the Pilot's sharpness is reassuring.

PILOT

Base Price (including destination):
$37,200

ODYSSEY

Base Price (including destination):
$32,3000

CONTRIBUTED

ONE COOL, COMFY MINIVAN

It's tough to tell when driving an Odyssey that it's actually a minivan and not a high-sided wagon. The steering is far from ponderous, yet the suspension soaks up the bumps as if it were a limo.

Which, when you come to think of it, is what it does best if you count ferrying kids to and from various activities.

When not serving that function, the Odyssey can haul a great deal of cargo that is accessible through its wide-opening sliding side doors and/or liftgate. Base models include the usual niceties plus Bluetooth networking, four-way power passenger seat, "Expanded View" driver's mirror and a rearview camera.

Combined with a power driver's seat, keyless entry and cruise control, the least expensive Odyssey is far from stripped down.

Atop the heap, the XL Touring Elite comes with self-leveling headlights, 16.2-inch rear video screen (bigger than the average the laptop computer screen), 650-watt 12-speaker surround-sound system and a handy "HondaVac" on-board 12-volt vacuum positioned at the rear of the van. It will run for up to eight minutes with the ignition in accessory mode, or continuously with the engine running.

A 3.5-litre V6 that produces 248 horsepower and 250 pound-feet of torque is common to all models. It features variable-cylinder-management that cuts out two or three of the cylinders under light-load conditions for improved fuel economy. Shifting duties are handled by a six-speed automatic transmission.

The list of available electronic safety includes lane-departure and forward-collision warning systems.

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GOING FROM CONTENDER TO LEADER

In a field dominated by the Honda CR-V, Ford Escape, Nissan Rogue, Mazda CX-5 and Toyota RAV4, buyers aren't wanting for choice.

The Tucson's design mimics that of the larger Santa Fe, especially when it comes to the trapezoidal grille. The Hyundai gains 7.6 centimetres in overall length while the front and rear wheels are set 2.5 centimetres farther apart.

Interior volume with the split-folding rear seat in place also increases by an impressive 20 per cent, but falls short of the league-leading Honda CR-V. The rear seat now reclines 37 degrees and the dashboard/control panel is now cleaner and more business-like.

The base SE gets a 2.0-litre four-cylinder that makes 164 horsepower. Optional is a turbocharged 1.6-litre four-cylinder that delivers 175 horsepower. It replaces the previously optional non-turbo 2.4-litre four-cylinder rated at 182 horses.

A six-speed automatic transmission connects to the 2.0, while a segment-exclusive seven-speed automated manual transmission is hooked to the turbo 1.6. All-wheel-drive is optional with the 2.0, but included with the turbo powerplant. The unit has an AWD lock control switch that lets you "hold" the torque split equally between the front and rear wheels for maximum traction on rough terrain.

The Tucson comes with a choice of non-turbo or turbo engines. CONTRIBUTED

TUCSON

Base Price (including destination): $26,200

AWD can also direct extra torque to the outside rear wheel when the Tucson is turning, while at the same time applying light braking to the inside rear wheel. This "torque vectoring" makes for more stable cornering.

For improved ride comfort and control, Hyundai has stiffened the front and rear suspension attachment points, upgraded the engine mounts and bushings and increased the amount of sound insulation. All Tucsons come with the usual power-operated features plus air conditioning.

Depending on the trim level you can outfit the Tucson with heated and leather-covered front and rear seats, dual-zone climate control, panoramic sunroof and the latest collision-mitigating/avoidance technologies.

A new Sonata Hybrid was a mid-2015 addition. CONTRIBUTED

Conservative yet stylish

With each new Sonata, Hyundai seemingly recreates the sheet metal from scratch, rather than evolving its design. For the current iteration that arrived for 2015, the Sonata now appears similar to the bigger Genesis sedan.

Inside there's a new dashboard and control panel, including an integrated display screen and numerous but logically positioned pushbuttons with fewer twisty knobs. The Sonata's base 2.4-litre four-cylinder makes 185 horsepower, down from the previous version's 200 horsepower.

Similarly, the optional turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder is rated at 245 horsepower (previously 274 horses). In each case, a six-speed automatic transmission directs power to the front wheels. Slotted between the two, and exclusive to the new Sonata Eco model, is a turbocharged 1.6-litre four-cylinder worth 178 horsepower. That engine connects to a seven-speed paddle-shifted manual transmission that delivers rapid-fire electronically activated shifts.

SONATA

Base Price (including destination): $25,700

Midway into the 2015 model year, Hyundai introduced the 2016 Sonata Hybrid that has a 154-horsepower 2.0-litre gas engine combined with a 51-horsepower electric motor to deliver a combined 193 horsepower. Unlike most conventional hybrids, the Sonata uses a six-speed automatic transmission instead of a continuously variable unit.

The gas-engine Sonata lineup consists of base GL, GLS and, Limited, Sport, Sport Tech, Sport 2.0 and Sport 2.0T Ultimate.

A panorama sunroof is optional, as are a number of popular electronic safety intervention aids that can help keep passengers safe and the Sonata from receiving unwanted body blows.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

The Santa Fe tries to be all things to all families by offering both two- and three-row seating capacities. To accomplish this, the automaker makes the shorter-wheelbase Santa Fe Sport or the longer (by 21.6 centimetres) seven-passenger Santa Fe XL.

The elongated version is heftier than the Sport by a good 1,820 kilograms, which explains why it's only available with a 290-horsepower 3.3-litre V6. Conversely, the Sport comes with a base 190-horsepower 2.4-litre four-cylinder, or the optional 264-horsepower 2.0-litre turbocharged four-cylinder. In all cases, the sole transmission is a six-speed automatic with manual shift controls.

Hyundai lets you add its latest all-wheel-drive setup with any Santa Fe you select. The system includes Torque Vectoring Corner Control (TVCC) that monitors driving conditions and can instantaneously direct the correct amount of power or braking force to any single wheel. TVCC assists in slippery conditions and provides added precision when negotiating turns.

SANTA FE

Base Price (including destination): $29,500

The Santa Fe comes with plenty of standard content plus unexpected treats, including Driver Selectable Steering Mode with Normal, Comfort (reduces steering effort by 10 per cent) and Sport settings (increases effort by the same amount). Turbo models add performance suspension components (stiffer shocks and thicker stabilizer bars), 19-inch wheels (17s are standard), fancier gauge cluster, push-button start and heated front seats.

The up-level V6 Limited comes with a wider selection of available content over the base XL model, such as dual-zone climate control, leather seat covers, second-row captain's chairs and blind-spot detection that alerts the driver if another vehicle is approaching the Santa Fe from either side.

This mid-sized tall wagon is available in regular- and extended-length versions, with five- or seven-passenger capacity, respectively. CONTRIBUTED

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ROOMY RIO

The peppy Rio gets a refresh for 2016, including an Eco Dynamics Package that reduces fuel consumption by about three per cent. CONTRIBUTED

The art of creating a small car is to have it look, drive and ride as if it were a larger, more expensive automobile. The Kia Rio has mastered this process and for 2016 expands on the theme with fresh front and rear styling and a richer looking and feeling cabin.

Unchanged is the Rio's standard 1.6-litre four-cylinder engine produces 138 horsepower and 123 pound-feet of torque, which works out just fine in a light 1,140-kilogram vehicle. All Rios come with six-speed manual transmissions or optional six-speed automatics.

To help save fuel dollars, automatic-equipped cars can be ordered with Idle Stop and Go (ISG) that shuts off the engine after the Rio comes to a complete stop, then instantly fires it up once the brake pedal is released. ISG is part of an Eco Dynamics Package that includes a special alternator that disengages under high engine load (such as when heading up hill) for reduced power loss and improved fuel performance. Kia claims overall fuel consumption is reduced by about three per cent with ISG.

The base Rio LX with the manual gearbox is somewhat light in the content department, but the mid-range EX includes air conditioning, plus lots of power-operated and convenience accessories. The top-end SX adds fancier interior trim, 17-inch wheels (15-inchers are standard), LED running lamps in place of the standard four-bulb units, and a voice-activated audio/communications package with backup camera.

The SX can also be outfitted with leather-covered seats, keyless start and a navigation system.

RIO

Base Price (including destination):
$15,900, $16,300 (Rio 5-door)

Sportage is designed to impress

Kia's compact tall wagon has clean lines and a gutsy turbo engine. CONTRIBUTED

The Sportage excels in a neighbourhood of tough competitors, led by the ever-popular Honda CR-V, Toyota RAV4 and Ford Escape. Credit its good looks and gutsy turbo engine option for maintaining a steady following.

For drivers, a selector varies the stiffness and "feel" of the steering depending on the level of feedback desired.

The base powerplant is a 2.4-litre four-cylinder that creates 182 peak horsepower and 177 pound-feet of torque. The optional turbocharged four-cylinder has an output of 260 horsepower 269 pound-feet. A six-speed manual transmission is standard with the 2.4, while automatic is optional, but standard with the 2.0 turbo.

The Sportage is a front-driver by nature, while the optional all-wheel-drive system, which is available for both engines, directs 100 per cent of engine torque to the front wheels until tire slip is detected. At that point, the required power is instantly deployed to the rear wheels. Additionally, a manually selected "Lock Mode" allows for a fixed 50:50 front:rear torque split at speeds up to 40 km/h for those times when sustained maximum traction is required.

Of the five trim levels, the top-line SX Luxury has unique body pieces and wheels and more supportive seats. An upgraded Infinity-brand audio system, panorama roof and push-button start are all optional, as are heated and cooled front seats.

SPORTAGE

Base Price (including destination):
$24,800

SORENTO

Base Price (including destination):
$29,200

CONTRIBUTED

WAGON HAS COMFORT, CAPABILITY

The Sorento isn't afraid to play with the more established segment leaders including the Ford Explorer, Nissan Pathfinder and Toyota Highlander.

The latest edition shows a strong similarity to the previous version, but most noticeable is a larger honeycomb grille and lower air intake, revised headlights and fog lights and an enlarged roof spoiler and new tail lamps.

Less obvious is the distance between the front and rear wheels that has grown by about eight centimetres. The increase amounts to a bit more cargo space, whether the second- and optional third-row seats are folded (almost) flat or are left in their upright positions.

The dashboard now appears less cluttered, with easier-to-use/find (larger) knobs and dials and bigger fresh-air vents. More sound insulation means a cabin that is almost devoid of outside road and wind noise.

For 2016, the Sorento's base powertrain is a 2.4-litre four-cylinder that makes 185 horsepower and 178 pound-feet of torque. That's a bit less than the previous 2.4's 191/181 numbers, but the new engine gets better fuel economy. A newly-available turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder increases performance to 240 horsepower and 260 pound-feet of torque, while returning unchanged is a 3.3-litre V6 that delivers 290 horsepower and 252 pound-feet.

Regardless of engine choice, the gears are shifted via a six-speed automatic transmission. The front-wheel-drive Sorento LX is the price leader, but as with the EX and SX, it can be had with all-wheel-drive that splits the torque 95:5 (front:rear) when roads are flat and dry.

When tire slip is detected — or during hard acceleration — front-to-rear torque split is 50:50. Additionally, depressing a "Lock" button on the control panel holds the split at 50:50 at low speeds for maximum traction.

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KIA The Power to Surprise

ROOMIER AND EVEN MORE RUGGED

While the hatchback B-Class is essentially nonexistent in the United States, the GLA provides a similar scope for cargo room.

Those preferring the slinkiness of the CLA sedan can take that route, while the more practically minded can opt for the GLA's added carrying capacity. Both vehicles appear similar from the windshield forward, but otherwise go their separate ways.

The GLA is taller and more squared-off, but minus a trunk, it is a significant 20 centimetres shorter in length. The base GLA 250 runs with a turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder that generates 208 horsepower and 258 pound-feet of torque.

Step up to the GL A45 AMG and, for its sophomore season, those values increase to 375 horsepower and 350 pound-feet, up 20 and 18, respectively, over 2015. The AMG's engine block has been strengthened and its turbocharger produces nearly twice the boost of the GLA 250's. That now results in a zero-to-100 km/h time of 4.5 seconds, versus a more leisurely 7.3 for the GLA 250 (as measured by Mercedes-Benz).

The GLA uses a turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder worth 208 horsepower. CONTRIBUTED

Each powerplant uses a fast-shifting seven-speed automated manual transmission with paddle shifters. The GLA 250 comes with front-wheel-drive, but can be had with M-B's 4MATIC all-wheel-drive that directs up to 50 per cent of the torque to the rear wheels, as needed. The GLA 45 AMG comes standard with AWD. For 2016, base GLA models include a seven-inch media interface display and keyless ignition.

They join the existing power liftgate, power driver's seat with memory and an autonomous braking system that slows down or even stops the vehicle if you neglect to react to slower or stopped traffic in front. A panorama sunroof and a sport package with extra body cladding and 19-inch wheels (18-inchers are standard) are optional.

The GLA 45 AMG includes unique wheels, sport bucket seats, sport suspension, exhaust and steering systems plus a faster-shifting transmission.

GLA

Base Price (including destination):
$39,200; $52,500 (GLA45 AMG)

All GLE models have 4Matic all-wheel-drive. CONTRIBUTED

Turbo-charged efficiency

If you haven't heard, Mercedes-Benz is fine-tuning the nomenclature of some of its models.

For 2016, the GLK-Class compact wagon has become the GLC-Class and the former M-Class has escaped from its chrysalis and turned into the GLE-Class. In addition, the GLE is now available as a four-door hatchback that M-B insists is a "coupe."

As with the M-Class, the GLE offers a repertoire of V6 and V8 powerplants that range from fuel-minded to take-no-prisoners high-output. Most engines get the same seven-speed automatic transmission, although the base GLE 350d uses the company's new nine-speed automatic.

The fuel-sipping but torque-rich GLE 350d is powered by a familiar 3.0-litre turbo-diesel V6 with 255-horsepower and well over 400 pound-feet of torque. It still has pretty phenomenal fuel efficiency figures of 10.1 l/100 km in the city and 8.0 on the highway.

The twin-turbocharged 329-horsepower 3.0-litre V6 gasoline engine in the GLE 400, while a 362-horsepower offshoot of the 3.0 is standard in the GLE 450 AMG hatchback coupe.

The GLE 550 offers a familiar 439-horsepower twin-turbocharged V8, although only in the wagon, while the AMG GLE63 S — in both wagon and coupe — that comes with a 577-horspower twin-turbocharged 5.5-litre V8.

Fully-loaded models display wood trim with satin nickel garnish and stitched leather seat covers. Long-distance drivers might want to pop for the available multi-contour front seats that'll massage your stress away.

GLE

Base Price (including destination):
$64,800 (GLE 350d wagon);
$73,600 (GLE 350d coupe)

NEW BRAND, SAME QUALITY

Mercedes-Benz's model realignment continues apace with the newly branded GLC, a vehicle that was previously called the GLK. The result is better proportioned than its blocky predecessor and offers a much-improved environment for passengers.

Although still a smallish mid-size wagon, the GLC 300 is a full 10 centimetres longer between the axles than the GLK and 12.5-centimetres longer overall. Moreover, the GLC is nearly 90 kilograms lighter, although some of that decrease is likely due to a smaller base engine.

For the vehicle's debut, Mercedes-Benz toned down the GLC's performance, deleted the turbo-diesel option and instead went for a turbocharged 2.0-litre four-cylinder that produces 241 horsepower and 273 pound-feet of torque. It's a far cry from the previous 302-horsepower 3.5-litre V6 that used to be the standard gasoline powerplant.

The engine is sourced from the current C-Class sedan, but it doesn't share that model's seven-speed automatic transmission. Instead, an all-new nine-speed automatic picks the gears for you.

As before, Mercedes's 4Matic all-wheel-drive is standard, and well worth it for more secure all-weather driving. Among the GLC's unique options is an air-ride suspension (in place of steel springs), which has to be a first in a class that includes the Audi RDX, BMW X3, Lincoln MKC and Audi Q5.

Another extra-cost upgrade is an active damping system that continually — as in milliseconds — adjusts the shocks' firmness while negotiating turns or when travelling over rough or uneven roads.

GLC

Base Price (including destination):
$51,500

What's in a name? It used to be called the GLK-Class; now this wagon has become the larger, but lighter, GLC-Class. CONTRIBUTED

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Teams are playing it safe with their marquee players

NHL

Caps, Hawks set up stretch run by resting their stars

A one-game, slap-on-the-wrist suspension isn't enough to stop NHL teams from keeping their banged-up players out of all-star weekend.

The league said Thursday that Chicago captain Jonathan Toews won't participate in all-star festivities in Nashville after he left a game this week with an illness. That came one day after the Capitals' Alex Ovechkin pulled out of all-star weekend with a lower-body injury that the team said has been bothering him since November.

Ovechkin and Toews by rule are suspended for the first game after the all-star break, the same punishment the Pittsburgh Penguins accepted last year with Sidney Crosby. The NHL's rule was first used in 2009 against Detroit Red Wings stars Nicklas Lidstrom and Pavel Datsyuk, and now it has been levied against five of the league's top players.

More teams are opting to play it safe.

"We had to make a conscious decision on that," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "That's the rules. You've seen other teams make that decision. I was out West, and Detroit's made that decision a few times. The ultimate goal for us is to go deeper than we did last year, so sometimes you have to make those decisions. We made it. And we'll just deal with it."

Ovechkin and Toews have each appeared at a handful of all-star games, and the price of missing a Feb. 2 game is insignificant compared with potential long-term ramifications. Blackhawks physician Michael Terry said Toews left Chicago's game Tuesday with an illness and was symptomatic again Thursday, so he believes "rest over the break is most important for him to properly recover and be fully healthy heading into the rest of the regular season."

> **"I have to get ready for the rest of the year ... I don't want to miss important things.**
> Alex Ovechkin

The Capitals are atop the NHL standings as the best team in the Eastern Conference, and the defending Stanley Cup-champion Blackhawks are the best in the West at the break.

Jonathan Toews, bottom left, and Alex Ovechkin, top left, will not play in the all-star tournament despite being prominently displayed outside of Nashville's Bridgestone Arena.
MARK HUMPHREY/THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Washington will still have three all-stars, as fellow Russian Evgeny Kuznetsov will replace Ovechkin and join centre Nicklas Backstrom and goaltender Braden Holtby in Nashville. The host Predators now have four representatives, since Toews' replacement is winger James Neal. He joins Nashville defencemen Shea Weber and Roman Josi and goalie Pekka Rinne.

New York Islanders centre John Tavares replaces Ovechkin as captain of the Metropolitan Division for the league's new 3-on-3 tournament format. Playing 3-on-3 for 20-minute periods is something Trotz expressed concern over earlier in the week. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

FLAMES

Wideman banned for hit on linesman

Calgary Flames defenceman Dennis Wideman has been suspended indefinitely pending a hearing for checking and knocking down linesman Don Henderson on Wednesday night.

Wideman will have a hearing Tuesday with the NHL's department of hockey operations.

During the second period of the Flames' game against Nashville, Wideman got up after being hit and struck Henderson on the way to the bench. Wideman said he was in pain and was just trying to get off the ice, adding that he couldn't avoid Henderson.

Wideman apologized to Henderson after the incident.

The Flames lost 2-1 to the Predators. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Dennis Wideman
GETTY IMAGES FILE

IN BRIEF

Determined Scott to play among best despite league trying to talk him out of it

John Scott has taken a shot at the NHL. Fans voted the 6-foot-8, 260-pound enforcer into the All-Star Game, which is on Sunday.

Scott writes in a story posted Thursday by The Players Tribune that he got a call from the NHL, trying to talk him out of participating in the showcase event.

Scott writes that the moment strengthened his decision to play in a 3-on-3 format with some of the best hockey players in the world. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Riders re-sign receiver Bagg until 2018

The Saskatchewan Roughriders have signed national wide receiver Rob Bagg to a contract extension through the 2018 season.

Bagg was eligible to become a free agent next month. He will return for his ninth season in Regina after signing with the Roughriders as an undrafted free agent in January, 2008. The 30-year-old Kingston, Ont., native has 3,708 yards and 19 touchdowns on 272 catches through 105 career regular-season games. THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

Raptors' DeRozan joins Lowry on all-star team

DeMar DeRozan is joining Toronto Raptors teammate Kyle Lowry in the NBA all-star game. The 26-year-old shooting guard was named an Eastern Conference reserve on Thursday.

It marks the first time the Raptors have had two players voted onto the all-star squad, and is a reward, says coach Dwane Casey, for a hardworking player and all-around good guy. "He is what you want an NBA player to be about," said Casey. THE CANADIAN PRESS

Record-streak Raps show tenacity

NBA

Toronto breaks franchise-best run with 10th straight win

THURSDAY In Toronto

RAPTORS	KNICKS
103	93

The Toronto Raptors have made history, winning a franchise-record 10 games in a row. Toronto's all-stars Kyle Lowry and DeMar DeRozan scored 26 points apiece to lift the Raptors to a 103-93 victory over the New York Knicks on Thursday, breaking a record that had stood for 14 years.

Lowry, whose sore wrist had him questionable to play right up until the players took the court for warmup, added 10 assists and six rebounds on the night. DeRozan's solid performance came just hours after he was named an NBA all-star reserve.

Jonas Valanciunas had a double-double with 11 points and 18 rebounds for Toronto (31-15), while Cory Joseph had 11 points. The Raptors' previous win streak was back in the spring of 2002, March 22-April 3. This historic hot stretch — the longest active win streak in the NBA — began Jan. 6 in Brooklyn. And then, one by one, they racked up the wins: Washington twice, Philadelphia, Orlando, Brooklyn again, Boston, Miami and the L.A. Clippers.

A jumper from Derrick Williams pulled the Knicks to within eight with 3:10 at the Air Canada Centre, before Lowry lit it up with eight straight points to put the Raptors safely ahead for good with 1:45 to play. THE CANADIAN PRESS

The Raptors' Terrence Ross dunks as Knicks' Sasha Vujacic defends during first half on Thursday. FRANK GUNN/THE CANADIAN PRESS

TENNIS

Serena looking unstoppable

When Serena Williams plays as well as she did in the semi-finals of the Australian Open, there's little an opponent can do to challenge her. Even one who's soon to be ranked No. 3 in the world, just two places behind her.

"I was just standing there kind of watching her play," the fourth-seeded Agnieszka Radwanska said after her 6-0, 6-4 drubbing by Williams on Thursday. "There was just no mistake. Unbelievable serve. Everything, she was going for it. I couldn't do much. Not at all, actually."

It's been a familiar feeling among the players Williams has brushed aside on the way to the final, her seventh at Melbourne Park. She's been so dominant at the Australian Open this year, in fact, she's reached the final without losing a set — something she's never achieved in 15 previous appearances.

She has dropped just 26 games in six matches, a number she has bettered just four times at the Grand Slams in her career.

Serena Willams GETTY IMAGES

Williams seems as surprised as anyone by how well she's playing. She didn't expect to be so sharp after taking a four-month hiatus following last year's U.S. Open — a necessary break, she said, to recharge after coming just two matches shy of a calendar-year Grand Slam. But as she's demonstrated many times in her career, putting the tennis rackets away for a while obviously agrees with her.

"I was extra busy on my new collection that I'm starting," said Williams, a sometimes fashion designer, who is wearing one of her own designs — a neon-yellow crop-top with pleated skirt — on the court in Melbourne.

"But I needed it. I needed time off just to, like, take a minute and just chill and reheal, get ready."

Williams certainly looks refreshed — both physically and mentally. She hurried through the first set against Radwanska in 20 minutes, winning all but seven points and allowing Radwanska just one winner while smacking 18 of her own.

Her performance was so complete, 18-time major winner Chris Evert asked her fellow TV commentators on ESPN, "How can you say she's not the greatest of all time when she plays like this?" THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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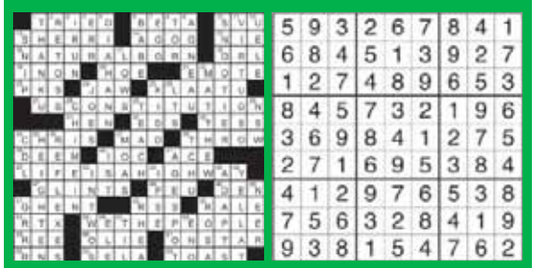

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RECIPE Egg Pizza

PHOTO: MAYA VISNYEI

Ceri Marsh & Laura Keogh
For Metro Canada

And just when you're ready to tell us there's nothing in your fridge and you have to order in: boom, a breakfast-for-dinner pizza you can whip up in minutes!

Ready in
Prep time: 5 minutes
Total time: 25 minutes
Serves 2

Ingredients
- 2 pitas
- 1 cup passata (or tomato or pizza sauce)
- Salt and pepper
- 1 1/2 to 2 cups mozzarella, grated
- 1/4 cup crisply fried bacon, crumbled
- Few leaves of basil
- 2 eggs

Directions

1. Preheat the oven to 450 F.

2. Place the pitas on a baking sheet. Pour tomato sauce on pitas and spread it around. Leave a little edge clear of sauce all the way around.

3. Sprinkle your cheese on each pita and push it slightly out the edges so you make a nest for your egg.

4. Sprinkle basil and the bacon all around the edge of your cheese nest. Gently crack an egg in the middle. Slide the cookie sheet carefully into the oven. Bake for about 15 to 20 minutes, depending on how done you like your eggs.

5. Use a spatula to move your egg pizza to a cutting board where you'll cut each pizza into four. Serve with slices of avocado, sour cream and a bit of salsa. Enjoy!

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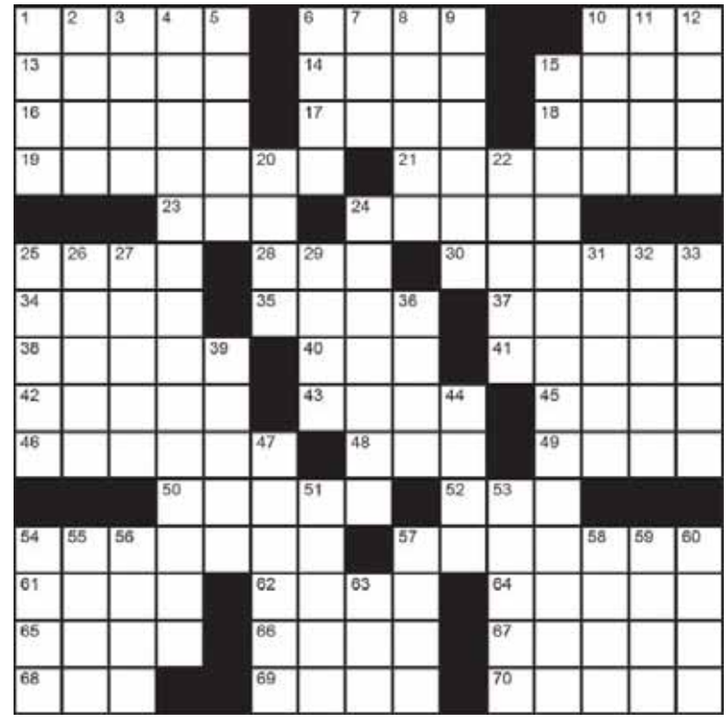
CROSSWORD Canada Across and Down

BY KELLY ANN BUCHANAN



ACROSS
1. _ Current, Saskatchewan
6. Luke Skywalker mentor
10. Soak through
13. Weakly
14. Authentic
15. 1978 suspenseful movie for Canadian actress Genevieve Bujold, co-starring Michael Douglas
16. "It just doesn't _ _..." (Detective's observation)
17. Oooh's friend
18. Dismounted
19. Trailblazer
21. Here Comes the Bride! Engage, 1800s-style
23. John _ (Steppenwolf's lead singer)
24. Last
25. The North _
28. _ of corn
30. "Runaway Train": 1993 hit for Soul _
34. Secondhand
35. Batch
37. Secret chest
38. This stuff
40. Three Dog Night hit
41. Gourmand
42. Electronics whiz [var. sp.]
43. Neutral tone
45. And others, briefly: 2 wds.
46. The Earth's largest desert
48. Female octopus
49. Singer/guitarist Mr. Feliciano
50. Sailor collar blouse
52. Freezer stuff
54. Artist's 'eggy' painting
57. Traveller's brief layover: 2 wds.
61. Spread-for-bread
62. _ S. Rombauer (Joy of Cooking author)
64. Basketry fibre
65. Varied mixture
66. Achievement
67. Celebrated
68. Actor Mr. Watanabe
69. Forest's one-of-some
70. Skiers are happy when it does this outside

DOWN
1. Switch
2. Sort of streambed
3. _-European (Language family)
4. Bit of "Beauty School Dropout" from Grease: "... missed your midterms and _ _."
5. _ _ personality
6. 2016, for one
7. Mozart opera, L'_ del Cairo
8. Abu _ (United Arab Emirates capital)
9. Goddess of The Parthenon
10. Alone
11. Fail to mention
12. Route
15. Canadian singer playing #24-Down in FOX's "Grease: Live" musical production on January 31st: 3 wds.
20. Peepers
22. Food's flavour
24. As per #4-Down and #15-Down, role in Grease
25. Golf taps
26. "Romeo and Juliet" (1968) actor Milo
27. Bloodsucker
29. Succulent plant
31. Friday game in Canada, _ Max
32. Places for irises
33. Mr. Haggard of country tunes
36. Are, no more
39. Hawk's habitation, variantly
44. Condo purchase
47. Undirected
51. "Hey! I bet you can't..." sayer
53. Hairdos
54. Removed
55. She, in Quebec City
56. Chow _ (Takeout dish)
57. Satisfy
58. Sgt. Snorkel's dog
59. Went by plane
60. Gov. workers
63. Daisy _ (Li'l Abner's beloved)

IT'S ALL IN THE STARS by Sally Brompton

Aries March 21 - April 20
Why do you feel that someone is watching you? Is it because you have a guilty conscience? You may have done something wrong and think others can tell just by looking at you. But they can't, so stop worrying!

Taurus April 21 - May 21
Don't make a big deal out of a trivial issue. In the larger scheme of things it's not important. Life is a game and not to be taken too seriously.

Gemini May 22 - June 21
You may be tempted to cut corners in order to get yourself an advantage. If you succeed you won't feel good about yourself. And if you don't your rivals will take delight in your embarrassment at being caught.

Cancer June 22 - July 23
Do you feel lucky? The planets warn that your feelings may not be the best guide to reality, err on the side of caution today. To put it bluntly: if you gamble you will most likely lose.

Leo July 24 - Aug. 23
Some people enjoy making a drama out of a crisis but you don't have to do likewise. No matter what happens, don't overreact. Stay calm and stay in control of your emotions. Someone needs to keep their head.

Virgo Aug. 24 - Sept. 23
It is never easy for you to hold up your hand and admit that you made a mistake but you must do so today. No one expects you to be perfect, so why do you expect it of yourself?

Libra Sept. 24 - Oct. 23
Someone is giving you a hard time is because they are under the impression that you can be pushed around. No matter what created that impression you must uncreate it. Give them a taste of their own medicine.

Scorpio Oct. 24 - Nov. 22
You have a tendency to get emotional over little things and that tendency is now heightened. Try not to overreact — no more than usual anyway!

Sagittarius Nov. 23 - Dec. 21
You get what you want more often than not but sometimes it pays to let others take the lead. There are a lot of pitfalls on the path you have chosen to take. Let others go first so it's not you who falls down them!

Capricorn Dec. 22 - Jan. 20
Might never makes right and you will make it your business to see that the good guys come out on top. Be guided by your principles and never allow yourself to be bought or bullied.

Aquarius Jan. 21 - Feb. 19
If each step forward results in two steps back it might be wise to take the hint and stay put. You don't have to be on the go every hour of every day, so slow down and enjoy where you are.

Pisces Feb. 20 - March 20
You may be tempted to take a risk today but that could be dangerous. What you think is your subconscious mind guiding you is in fact nothing more than wishful thinking.

CONCEPTIS SUDOKU by Dave Green

Every row, column and box contains 1-9

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DON'T LIVE IN THE PAST

Forgetting about the past can be a spring board to your lifting. The humiliation Joseph received from his brothers by selling him into slavery never deters him from forging ahead. That made his appointment as the prime minister of Egypt possible by God. His ordeal became a sweet testimony before his brothers when he said "So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me adviser to Pharaoh the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt" (Genesis 45:8 NLT) Are you living in unforgiveness? Be an example of Jesus who forgave despite the humiliation he received.

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